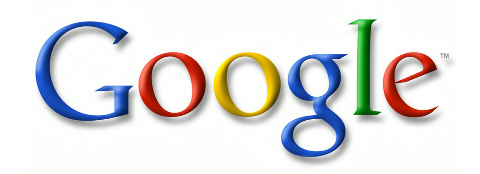
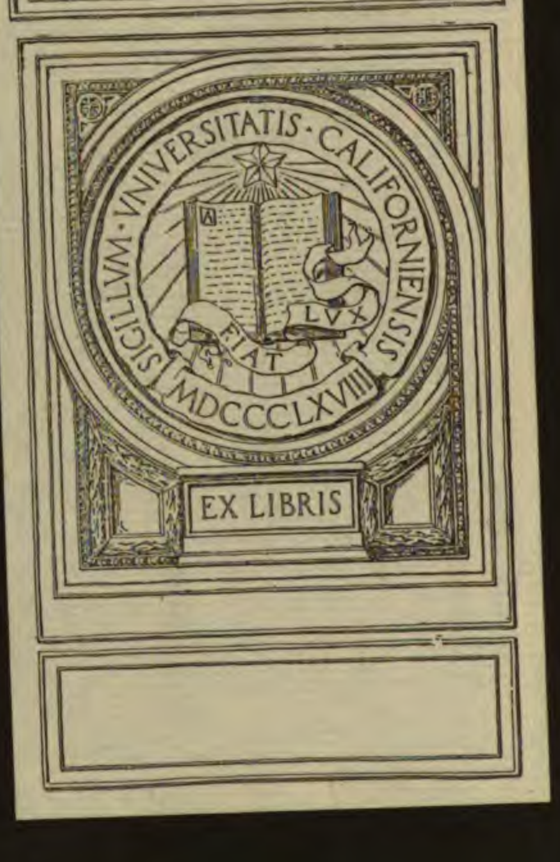
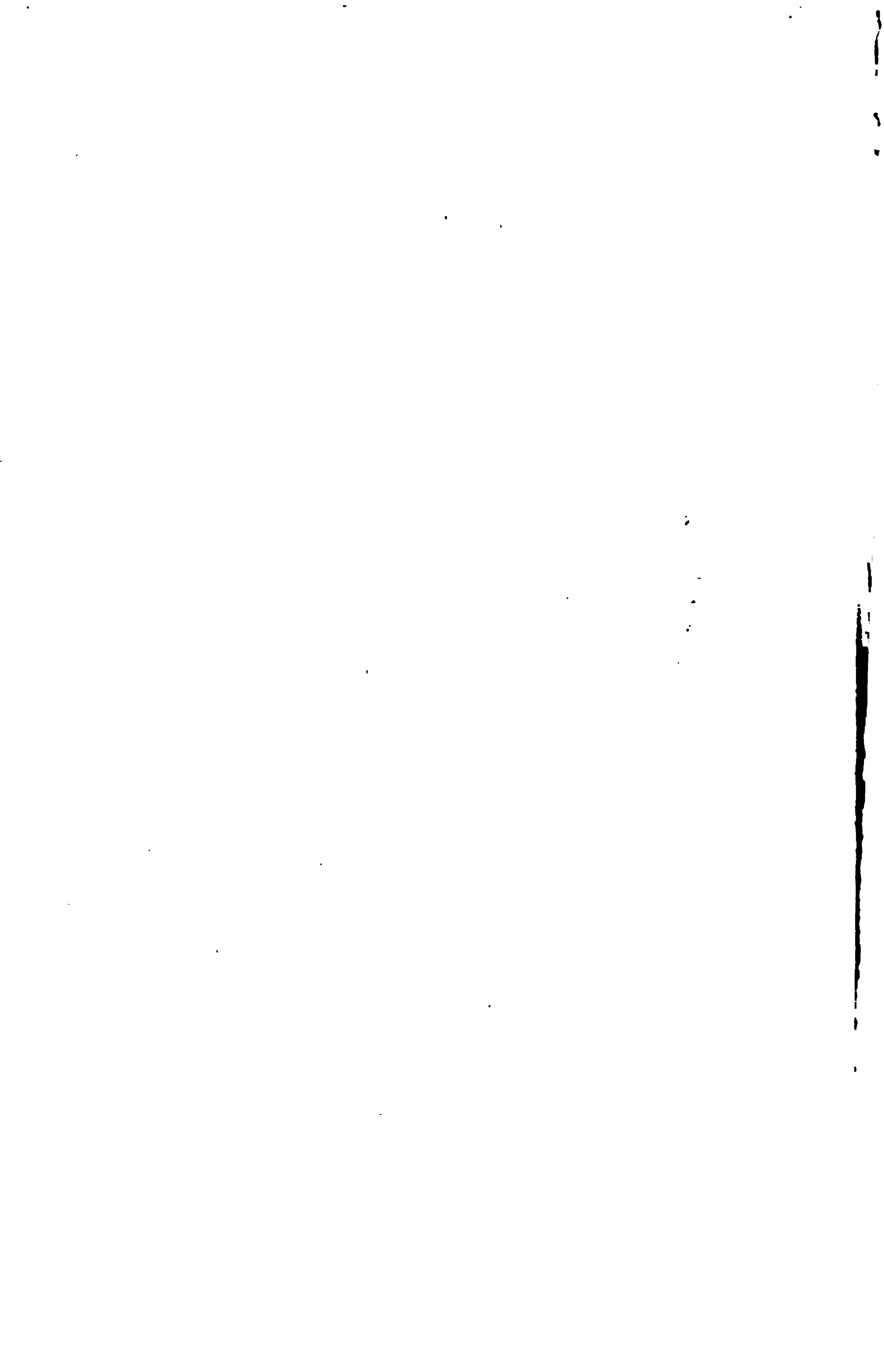



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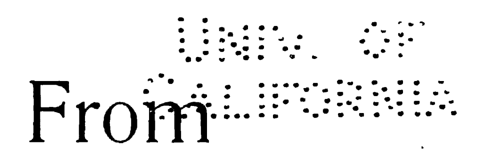
From Sphinx to Oracle





ARRIVAL AT SIWA, IN A SANDSTORM.

Frontispiece



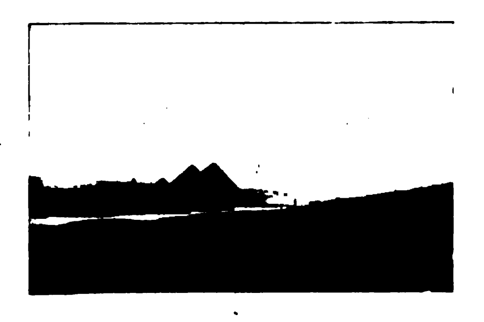
From Sphinx to Oracle

THROUGH THE LIBYAN DESERT TO THE OASIS OF JUPITER AMMON

BY

ARTHUR SILVA WHITE, Hon. F.R.S.G.S.

AUTHOR OF 'THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA' ETC.



WITH 56 ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR
A FRONTISPIECE BY R. TALBOT KELLY, R.B.A.
AND TWO MAPS

LONDON
HURST AND BLACKETT, LIMITED
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1899

Carpenter

TO

HARRIET AND
ROBERT COX OF GORGIE

IN MEMORY OF THE PAST



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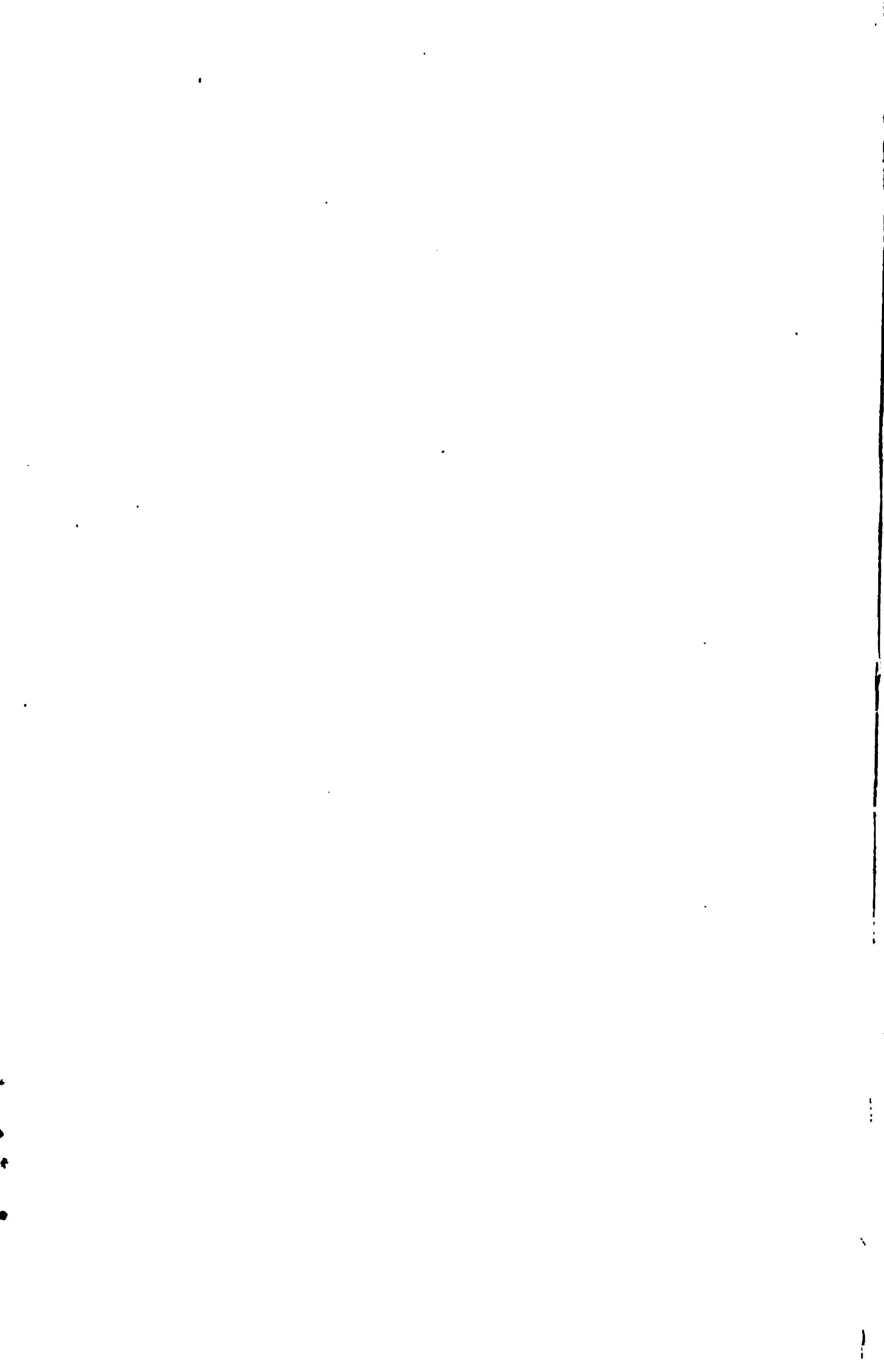
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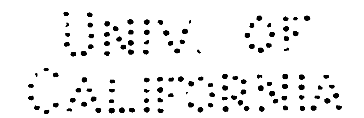
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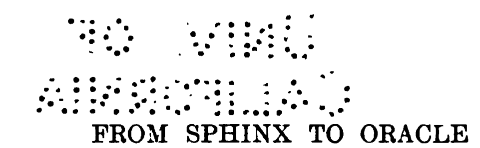
FROM SPHINX TO ORACLE

INTRODUCTION

He who has challenged the stony stare of the Sphinx, alone, in the sonorous silence of the desert, in the mellow moonlight, is apt to read his own interpretation of the mystery of life and of death, which perhaps it symbolizes.

The Sphinx ignores the desert at its feet, which the bounteous Nile converts into a garden of delight. Its gaze is bent on the sand-swept horizon, the threshold of the Unknown, the bourn of the Spirit-world. It is a dream in stone.

I have spent many pleasant midnight hours in the company of the Sphinx; and here, for the first time, I fell under the spell of the desert. In the radiance of a full-moon, the landscape is invested with a charm it does not possess in the uncompromising glare of sunlight. Primary colours are clearly distinguishable, but are so subtly blended, under the vestal veil of moonlight, that Spirit here triumphs over Matter: the solid stone speaks of the genius that has wrought, and



of the myth and mystery that surround, these ancient monuments. The colossal Pyramids, near by, are bathed in a roseate haze which, mingling with the night-shadows at their base, destroys their crushing materiality. A silence that can be felt increases the spell, and lures one away from the habitations of men.

But to fully realize the desert, one must travel far into its solitudes and drink deep of its silence. When the restless movements of the human maëlstrom fade from the mind, when the clattering tongues of Babylon find no echo in the memory, the spirit of the desert enters the heart of the wanderer and takes possession of it. Charming all minds capable of imagination, it brings peace to many: but woe to him who chafes at the isolation and looks for mirages in the limitless sands!

No man should wander in the desert without a definite object in view. The more difficult the object, the more he will appreciate the pleasure of overcoming obstacles to its attainment. For my own part, I did not require to go very far in quest of an objective, of an excuse for my wanderings in the wilderness; nor had I any reason to complain of the paucity of obstructions in its way. The goal of my ambition lay less than 500 miles to the west of the spot where the Sphinx keeps watch and ward. I refer to Jarabub, the Mecca of the African continent.

No European had been able, though many had striven, to reach this stronghold of the Senussi. Con-

sequently, object and obstacles presented themselves to my mind under the attractive guise of an adventure. True, I scarcely hoped to succeed where others had failed; but success for me lay more in the effort than in the achievement, being subjective rather than objective. As a professional invalid, too, it gave me peculiar satisfaction to escape for a time from the thraldom of my medical advisers, especially the dear amateurs; though, for the same reason, I had a rooted objection to the prospective discomforts of desert-travel, my belief in the chastening of the flesh being wholly theoretical. I therefore prescribed for myself as follows:

"℞.

Of camels, six;
Of men, seven;
And of food and raiment, some:

Sig.

To be taken, with water, in the desert, every day for eight consecutive weeks.

As the sequel will show, I failed to reach Jarabub. The Oracle of Jupiter Ammon, dumb for twenty centuries, its shrine violated and cast down, spoke again in no uncertain voice. It commanded me, in the name of the Mahdi, to arrest my footsteps on the threshold of Senussi-land, at the oasis of Siwa.

Thus was the counsel of the Sphinx set at naught by the rude utterance of the Oracle. In the domain of the Sahara Desert, and beyond, the word of the Sheikh el-Senussi el-Mahdi is law to millions of men.

CHAPTER I

A RETROSPECT

The Oracle of Jupiter Ammon appears to have enjoyed a certain, if somewhat nebulous, sanctity in pre-historic times. It is believed that Seti Meneptah II., the supposed Pharaoh of the Exodus, obtained its sacerdotal sanction for his drastic decree of expulsion. More certain is the fact that, at the period of its highest repute, when Alexander the Great visited Jupiter Ammon, the Oracle, which addressed him as the 'son of Zeus,' rivalled those of Delphi and Dodona. Its origin, though obscure, cannot, however, have been other than Egyptian, springing from Thebes prior to the close of the Middle Empire.

In recorded history, Herodotus, who came to Egypt in the reign of Amyrtæus (Amen-rut: about 400 B.C.), was the first to mention the oasis of Ammon, under which designation it was well known to the ancients and referred to by Pliny, Strabo, and Ptolemy. Edrisi, Makrisi, and other Arab authors wrote vaguely of Ammon, or Siwa, as Santariat—a name which, according to Rohlfs, is still preserved in the oasis with that

of Iskender (Alexander)—but their accounts are vitiated by the introduction of fiction and fable. The ancient inhabitants of the Nile Valley called Siwa 'the land of dates' (*Sekhet-am*); whilst hieroglyphic texts, as far back as 1600 B.C., refer to two oases (*uit*)—one in the north (*Mahit*), and another in the south (*Ris*). In short, much confusion existed in the days of Herodotus, and continues to prevail, as to the exact name under which Jupiter Ammon was known to its founders. To elucidate this point, the hieroglyphs still extant in the oasis, though undeciphered, offer valuable material for Egyptologists.

The Romans appear to have neglected the Oracle; while the Greeks raised temples to Ammon, not only in Cyrenaica, but also in the motherland. Its fame declined and was held in slight repute at the beginning of the Christian era, Siwa and the other oases being used, during the domination, merely as places of exile.

Politically, Siwa has always been a dependency of Egypt, although, until its conquest by Mehemet Ali in 1819, it enjoyed semi-independence. Cambyses sent an army against the Ammonians, with the object of destroying and pillaging the two temples; but it never reached the oasis. According to Herodotus, the army, starting from Thebes, was annihilated in a raging *khamsin* [1] when about half-way across the desert. Sub-

[1] A strong southerly wind, the heat and dryness of which are very distressing to animal and human life.

sequently, the Ammonians willingly submitted to the Persian and Macedonian domination—the Persian monarchs exacting a tribute of the famous Ammon salt; and under the Ptolemys and Romans, they enjoyed self-government, having their own kings and high-priests. The wave of Mohammedan conquest in the seventh century engulfed the oases of North Africa; and, since the middle of the twelfth century, Siwa has remained under the militant banner of Islam.

Among distinguished visitors to Jupiter Ammon, besides Alexander, were the venerable Crœsus of Lydia, Lysander, Hannibal, and Cato the Younger, who journeyed thither to consult the Oracle. But, for us moderns, the most famous and profitable visit of all was made in 1792 by Browne, an Englishman, who then practically re-discovered the oasis.

Of the travellers, conquerors, functionaries, and, finally, tourists who have visited Siwa during the nineteenth century, not more than twenty have been Europeans. It is to the latter, exclusively, that we owe our exact though very imperfect and scrappy knowledge of the oasis. Most of them have had to face obstacles of a very formidable character, owing to the fanaticism and exclusiveness of the Siwans; and several have barely escaped with their lives. Many sought to pass as Arabs; but their disguise has in every case been discovered and their danger consequently enhanced.

Only those who have entered the oasis under military protection or, at favourable times, in their avowed character as Christians, have enjoyed any measure of freedom and tolerance. A brief retrospect will be necessary to elucidate and establish these facts.

Browne left Alexandria in February, 1792. Attaching himself to a date-caravan, he endeavoured to pass as a Mámlûk; but his disguise was detected on the very first day of his arrival at Siwa. He was requested to return the way he came, immediately, or to become a convert to Islam. Pacified by the chiefs, however, the Siwans did not exact these onerous conditions; but whenever Browne ventured to leave his sanctuary, he was 'assailed with stones and a torrent of abusive language.' Only on the fourth day was he permitted to see something of this remarkable place, which appealed so strongly to his instincts as an explorer and gratified his ambition as a discoverer. He appears to have seen very little of the antiquities and nothing of the inner town of Siwa. At the end of a week, he was permitted to leave, and went secretly to Arashié, of which he had heard fabulous accounts; but he discovered only a Doric temple on the way thither.

Six years later, Hornemann, an agent of the African Association, left Cairo on his ill-fated journey to Murzuk. He, like his predecessor, joined a date-caravan, in the character of a Mámlûk trader. He spent eight days at Siwa. On his departure, he was suspected; and

the Siwans despatched an armed force to attack his caravan. It was only with the greatest difficulty, and by employing the grossest deceit, that he persuaded his pursuers of the integrity of his faith as a Mohammedan. The value of his researches at Siwa rests chiefly on the Notes and Appendices, by Sir William Young and others, attached to the posthumous volume of his travels.

The year 1819 was momentous in the modern history of the oasis. The stubborn pride of the Siwans was then broken by the military expedition under Shamaskirgi Bey, which, consisting of nearly two thousand troops, had been despatched by Mehemet Ali for the conquest of this and other oases contiguous to Egypt. Accompanying this expedition were three or four Europeans, who had the run of the oasis, but were not permitted to enter Aghormi, the fortress-village in which the larger temple of Jupiter Ammon is situated, nor the inner town of Siwa. These privileged guests were the Consul-General Drovetti, Linaud de Bellefonds, Ricci, and Frediani.

In the same year, Butin, a French Colonel, visited Siwa, where he was imprisoned and narrowly escaped with his life; and the well-known traveller, Caillaud, also arrived in the oasis. The latter, though he had to contend against every possible obstacle placed in his way, did some good work during his brief visit: in particular, he was the first to establish, by scientific

observation, the depth of the oasis below sea-level. But he was not allowed to enter the town of Siwa; and it was only after wearisome negotiations that he was eventually permitted to pay a hasty visit, under surveillance, to the temple of Umma Beyde.

A few months later, in 1820, Minutoli led an expedition to Siwa under the auspices of the King of Prussia. He himself was well received; but, on his departure, in advance of his companions, the latter were badly treated. Although he remained only five days at Siwa, Minutoli collected and subsequently published the most complete and reliable account we possess, chiefly of the antiquities; and his illustrations are valuable.

Pacho, a French artist, left Alexandria in the winter of 1824, and spent six months travelling in North Africa. He visited Siwa more than once; but died, in 1829, before the results of his investigations in the oasis could be given to the world.

No other European is known to have passed through Siwa during the ensuing period of years, until, in 1847, Bayle St. John, an Englishman, appeared on the scene. He was not able to accomplish much, on account of the great difficulties and opposition against which he had to contend.

Six years passed before the arrival of another European, to whom we are largely indebted for the subsequent immunity of travellers from the severest

forms of persecution. This was Hamilton, an Englishman, the discoverer of the larger temple of Jupiter Ammon. He was repeatedly fired at, and was held in captivity for many weeks, until freed by a military expedition which the Viceroy of Egypt, Saïd Pasha, despatched for his relief. After his arrival at Cairo, a second expedition of 200 men was ordered to Siwa to disarm the town and bring back the prisoners. Hamilton's brave bearing and the punishment he caused to be inflicted on the Siwans are still remembered in the oasis, to the profit of his successors.

After him came Rohlfs, the famous German explorer, who visited Siwa in the years 1869 and 1874. On both occasions he was hospitably received; and, though fettered by many restrictions, he was enabled to perform useful scientific work. The published accounts of Minutoli and Rohlfs are not very comprehensive, but they are the best we have.

Robecchi, an Italian, followed in 1886. He issued from the Press an imposing, illustrated volume on Siwa, which contains too great a proportion of extraneous matter; but during his visit he was so much hampered in his movements by obstructions and vexations of all kinds that his facilities for observation were greatly curtailed.

In the present decade, the Siwans have received five visitors in rapid succession, towards all of whom, with the exception of myself, the last, they have exhibited

an ungracious attitude of exclusiveness. The first was Blundell, who, had he been better received, might have accomplished good work; the second, Jennings Bramley, was used as a stalking-horse by the Egyptian official, Maher Bey, in order to obtain the unpaid taxes on date-palms, and had to leave precipitately on the second day; the third, Ward, a journalist, spent one night at Siwa; and the fourth, Blunt, my predecessor, nearly paid with his life the discovery of his disguise as an Arab. Blunt's tent was fired into, his camp was looted, and he himself was roughly handled on subsequently effecting his escape.

It will be seen, therefore, that the few Europeans who have ventured to visit Siwa have not met with a very cordial reception. The reason for this, and for my own exemption from persecution, will be evident as my narrative advances.

CHAPTER II

A PROSPECT

It was my second winter in Egypt. Circumstances had brought me into close relations with the leading English and Egyptian officials at Cairo, to whom I had been indebted for much sympathetic assistance in the prosecution of my political studies: consequently, it was necessary for me to disguise the true object of my projected journey.

Had Siwa alone been the objective, no opposition, except of a passive kind, would have been offered. Siwa, it is true, had a bad reputation; but being in Egyptian territory, no reasonable objection could be raised to travellers proceeding thither, provided they went at their own risk. Owing to its remote geographical position, the mere handful of Egyptian police that occupies the oasis, as a symbol of sovereignty, cannot be expected to afford travellers any adequate assistance against the fanaticism of a turbulent and warlike population, numbering several thousands. Law and order in the oasis are upheld by prestige rather than by police protection; and this

influence has increased enormously since the British Occupation of Egypt. But neither prestige nor police can operate successfully in a region so peculiarly hostile to all European and Egyptian influences as that which separates Siwa from Jarabub, a distance of only 110 miles, but forbidden ground to all Christians and Egyptian officials.

The circumstances creating this anomalous situation are too complex to explain in this place: these refer properly to the Senussi Question, which will be discussed in another chapter. It is sufficient to state here, that Jarabub, though situated in Tripoli, in the Sultan's dominions, is itself the sacred soil, and until quite recently was the metropolitan fortress, of the Senussi, who own allegiance to no earthly ruler. The command of the Mahdi is, that no European shall be permitted to pass to Jarabub; and the Siwans themselves are entrusted with the execution of this order. Later, it will be seen what steps are taken to enforce this prohibition, and how impossible it is for a Christian to evade the sinister consequences.

Clearly, the Khedivial Government, not being able to protect, would do all in its power to prevent, travellers seeking to force a passage through Siwa to the sanctuary of the Senussi. Any grave misfortune befalling them would inevitably create a diplomatic incident; and, for reasons that will become obvious, when the Senussi Question is explained, it is to the

interest of Egypt to 'let sleeping dogs lie' as long as they like.

I had, therefore, to keep secret not only my desire to penetrate to Jarabub, but also my intention of proceeding first to Siwa, lest, from my known habits as a troublesome political inquirer, the former resolve might have been inferred from the latter destination. For the Senussi Question was 'in the air,' so far as Egyptian officials were concerned, little as it is known or understood outside a very small coterie of students. It looms up very large in the Intelligence Department of the Egyptian War Office; and is rightly regarded as a dangerous issue into which all outsiders should be discouraged to enter. For myself, it had for many years been a subject of interested speculation; and the prospect of coming into close contact with the Senussi was in itself most alluring. Not that I expected to obtain much exclusive information on the spot: on the contrary, I believed such facts were easier procured in Cairo itself, or, better still, in Algeria, where the question is vital and has long been understood and studied. Not even that I confidently expected to succeed in reaching Jarabub: the evidence was dead against the realization of such a prospect. But my reasoning led me to hope that difficulties would lie down as they were fairly faced, and that perhaps they had been exaggerated. Nothing but personal experience would satisfy me that

what I proposed to accomplish was an impossible task. And so I took counsel of no man, except of my dragoman, on technical points regarding the equipment of a caravan. He alone was in my confidence; and his advice was re-assuring:

'If,' said he, 'your God and my God say you die,



CAMP SCENE

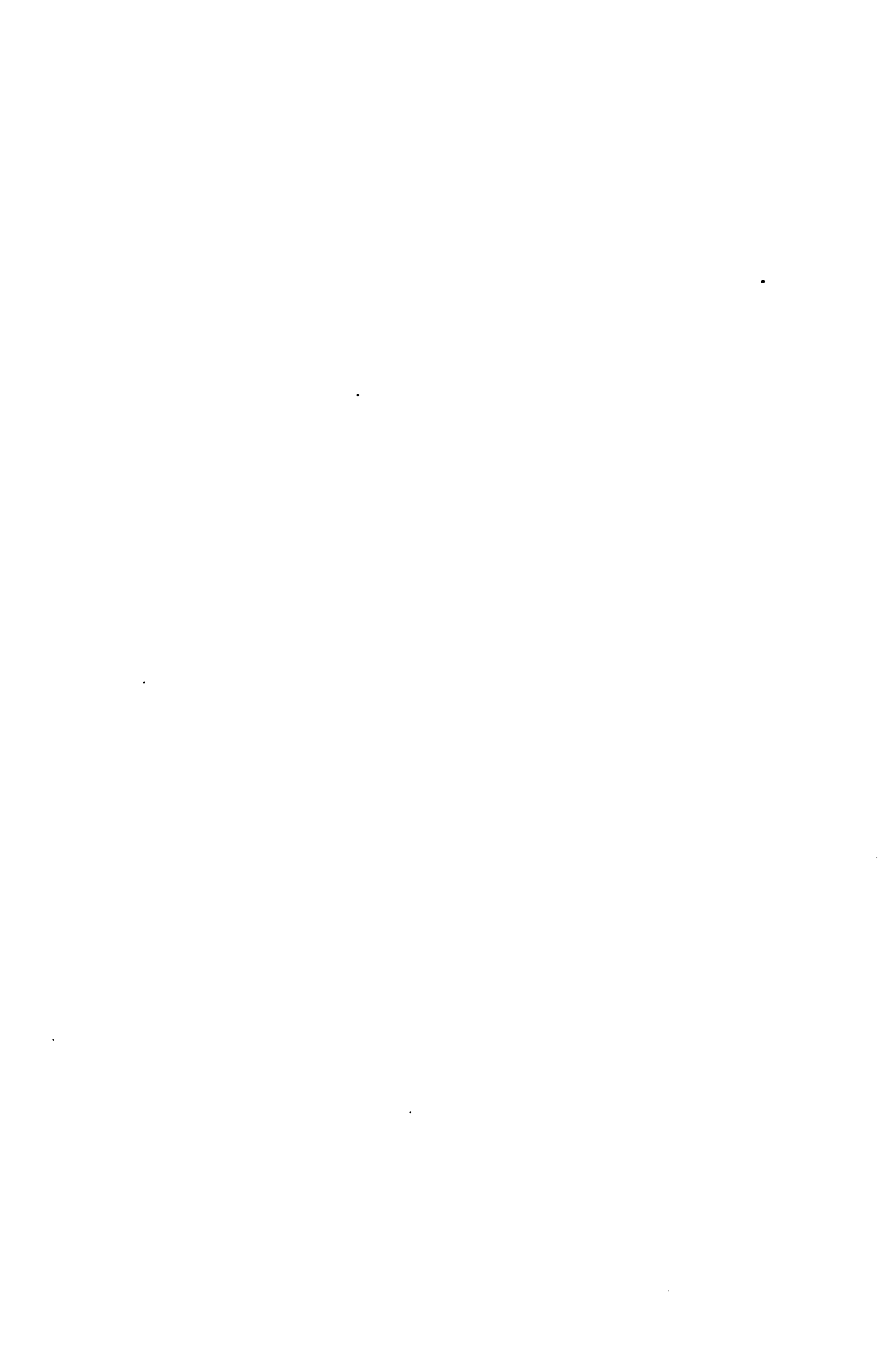
you die. Perhaps you die in Cairo, perhaps at Jarabub? You no help!'

He had a profound mistrust for the Siwans, having once previously travelled to the oasis; and he knew something of the Senussi: but the prospect of gain led him to encourage my plans.

To him I entrusted the organization and equipment of my modest caravan. I knew nothing of desert-travel; I did not even speak Arabic: and I was therefore wholly dependent on the services of this man. The necessity for secrecy, such as I understood it, closed for me many avenues of advice. I gave out merely, that I was going on a trip into the western desert, and indicated the Great Oasis as a *but de promenade*.

A fortnight after my resolve was first formed, I was ready to start. This interval gave sufficient time for preparations of the most necessary kind. It left me little leisure to add to my mental equipment. But the literature on the subject being meagre, it was rapidly skimmed; and, having no serious intentions as an explorer, nor adequate training, I did not attempt to fit myself for work of that character. Being the season for *khamsins*, during which sandstorms might be expected in the desert, and the hot weather coming on, I was anxious to get away as soon as possible.

Thus, imperfectly prepared, though fairly well equipped, I left Cairo on the 15th March, 1898, for my camp near the Pyramids.





MEMBERS OF THE EXPEDITION.

CHAPTER III

THE CARAVAN

My object in spending a night in camp, before actually starting on my journey in the Libyan Desert, was to test, by experience, the equipment of the caravan, which had been left entirely to the dragoman. In desert-travel, it is obvious that even a trifling omission may prove to be of serious consequence. Away from the resources of civilization, a caravan must be self-dependent, down to the smallest detail.

On riding into camp, I found that the tents had been pitched quite close to the road, near the village of the dragoman. Consequently, I ordered an immediate adjournment to the spot I had previously designated. It was giving trouble for a slight benefit; but I felt it necessary at the outset to exact compliance with my instructions. Arabs are keen judges of character; and I intercepted many interrogative glances in my direction. We spent a pleasant evening together.

The first night in camp, on the eve of an expedition, has a special charm. It was the more pleasing to me because, having been associated for many years with

the work of exploration, the journey before me was the nearest approach I had hitherto made in that direction, though far removed from the serious side of travel. I regarded myself as an amateur, to whom impressions were of more importance than practical results.

My caravan consisted of seven men and six camels; and we carried two tents—one for myself, the other for the canteen. The men, whom now I saw for the first time, made a good appearance. Briefly, I must introduce them to the reader.

Abdul, the dragoman, better known among his friends as Azus, was typical of his class, but better set up than the majority of those who hang about the hotels in Cairo. His chief business was to take tourists on shooting expeditions or up the Nile; and his flourishing circumstances spoke well for his experience. He had been recommended to me the previous winter by Mr. Ward, whom he had accompanied to Siwa; and his appearance made a good impression on me: a little too obsequious, like the rest of his kind, and no more to be trusted, but conspicuously a man of determination and resource. In my dealings with him, I found him neither too grasping, considering his opportunities, nor deficient in the qualities of a good dragoman. He never spoke the truth, of course, but that I did not expect of him. Always smiling, ever willing, and possessing many of the refinements and good qualities of his race, he was a suitable travelling-companion.

His brother, Saïd, who acted as my camelman and personal attendant, was his superior in every way, except in worldly means. Sons of a nomad Arab, who had settled at El-Kom el-Aswad, Giza, one had cultivated the tourist, the other the soil. Saïd was a man



OUR CAMP NEAR THE PYRAMIDS

of splendid physique, with all the manly virtues, not even excluding a respect for truth. He was thoroughly trustworthy, and proved his fidelity.

The cook was a character. He called himself a Turk, of Constantinople, and dressed up to the part;

but he was introduced to me as a Gypsy, and behaved as such. An excellent cook, he had travelled all over the world; and his stories of the great people he had served, especially in the Sudan Campaign of 1884–1885, were always pointed to prove his good qualities and the appreciation with which these had been regarded. Still, Abu was a rascal. He stole my food, and took advantage of his fellows in the control he had over the water. He was always thirsty, always tired, and always grumbling. He was an inimitable *raconteur*; and, though the butt of the party, his ready wit and caustic tongue carried him triumphantly through every scrape. A much-married man, he, being desperately poor, had, of course, a large family. His little squat figure, putty features, old and wrinkled face, were all illumined by a charming smile, which transfigured him; whilst the humour in his eye and his quaint gesture-language entirely captivated me. He traded on that smile, and on his large family. For quite two days I was a victim to his guile, after which his blandishments ceased to cover his iniquities.

Abd-el-Gade was a son of the desert, a Bedwi who had passed his life in roving and had never slept under a roof. His business was to conduct date-caravans between Cairo and Siwa; and once he had been to Jarabub: therefore, for my purpose, he was a suitable guide. His lithe, athletic frame, his delicately-moulded features, small hands and feet, were characteristic of

his aristocratic race. He might have posed for a picture: a typical Arab, or Semite.

These were my four chief men. The principal camelman was an Abyssinian, the son of a slave. Standing fully six feet in height, he was a man of herculean strength, and, in repose, a bronze statue of perfect proportions. Abdurrahman was a black man with a white heart, a child in character but a man among men in physical endowments.

Of the other two camelmen, both were Felláhin, or Egyptians: strong men, with the faults of their race. They had names, of course—long names: but I christened them Upper and Lower Egypt, owing to the conspicuous difference in their height.

Altogether, they were as good a set of followers as one could expect to find. With the exception of the cook, tough as he was, all were men of fine physique, inured to hardship from their birth, and familiar with their duties. Our party was, in fact, a microcosm of Egypt: nomad and sedentary Arabs, Felláhin, a Turk of doubtful origin, and an Abyssinian to represent the black element. Over all was the British Control, minus the international fetters. One might travel far and fare well with such followers. And, as for arms, we carried five guns and a revolver.

Five of the camels had been fed up on clover, in view of their toilsome journey; the sixth, obtained at the last moment, was our *bête noire*. My riding-camel,

dignified by the courtesy-title of *hagîn*, was in reality merely a superior baggage-camel. The others were overladen from the first, owing to our excessive *impedimenta.* Properly speaking, we should have had at least one spare camel with us; which would have saved us much tribulation. One of the camels, too, had a calf, which accompanied us the whole of the way, and was the pet of the caravan: only fifteen days old when it started, nobody expected it to survive the journey.





A HALT.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE MARCH

I LEFT the Pyramids on March 16th, 1898, the third anniversary of the arrival of Slatin Pasha at Aswan after his escape from Omdurman.

Our march that day, owing to the late hour of departure, was for four hours only, along the margin of the cultivated land and through the pass in the Libyan hills, from which our last view of the verdant valley of the Nile was obtained.

The men were in high spirits. With the exception of the dragoman, they were ignorant of their destination. Saïd, Abd-el-Gade, and Abdurrahman had, of necessity, been told that Siwa was our goal; and it was not my intention to speak of more ambitious plans until that place had been reached. Had the camel-men known that we were going even to Siwa, of evil omen, they would not have started, save, perhaps, on very exceptional terms.

Abdul rode ahead on a showy Arab mare of his own, which he left at a village near which we passed; and Abu strode forward manfully, carrying a gun, with the

stock reversed, over his shoulder: each in his way enjoying this little *fantasia*, proper to the occasion. Their purpose became evident when, at a considerable distance ahead, I observed a formal parting between them and their respective wives, as I judged the bedraped females to be. When Abu returned to the caravan, he cast a deprecating look at the overladen camels, and held on to the pack of one of them, since he could not be mounted.

Our first night in the open desert had all the charm of novelty for me. The men knew their duties, and took a childish delight in showing off: the tents were pitched with military precision, and all the baggage was disposed laager-fashion, the long Arab guns being placed on the top, directed towards the cardinal points of the compass, as if in an enemy's country. All this was done to impress me, and did most favourably: but on no subsequent occasion did I observe quite the same smartness or precaution.

The camels were in a ring, munching at their fodder, with that peculiar air of *insouciance* characteristic of the beast; while the men were busy preparing their humble meal and for their night's rest. When I went amongst them, to make their better acquaintance and to bestow commendation and cigarettes, I was at once button-holed by Abu, who, with smiling face and many gesticulations, recounted to me all the wonders of his previous travels. He spoke to me of Khartum,

of the march of the Desert column, and of how, during the Dervish attacks, bullets had whistled about his devoted head. As the men called him Abu-zeyd, and he professed to have known Sir Samuel Baker at Khartum, I was vividly reminded of the latter's *bête noire*, Abu Saûd. His mimicry was most entertaining.

The journey from Cairo to the Wadi Natrun, along the old pilgrimage track, is profoundly unattractive; but for me it had many charms. The brilliant sun and exhilarating air, the most trifling incident, and all the details of a caravan in the desert, compensated for the absence of scenic detail. The Wadi Faragh is an uncompromising desert, and therefore the more alluring to one who wished to realize the desert in its most desolate aspect. Fossil wood and curious concretions strew the sand, which is covered with the gravel and grit of harder rocks. One passes from one shallow basin, or trough, into another, and onwards into others of exactly similar appearance. There is no vegetation for the camels except here and there an occasional tuft, which is promptly cropped by the camel that passes it.

Slowly and silently the caravan crawls over these desolate wastes. Sometimes the camels are tied together, in a string, the headstall of one attached to the pack of another preceding it; or, walking free, they stalk in company, ostentatiously indifferent to

their surroundings. With no vegetation to attract them, life to them is an intolerable burden.

On the second day we marched for eight hours, arriving early in the afternoon of the third day at Dehr Abu Makar, or Dehr Macarius, as it is sometimes called, the most southerly of the Coptic monasteries in the Wadi Natrun. In view of the long journey before us, travelling to Dehr Makar was performed in easy stages. There also we waited during the remainder of the day, instead of watering the camels and hurrying on, in order that I might have leisure to visit the monastery.

Only four of these curious citadel refuges remain intact out of the fifty mentioned by Gibbon. They date from the third or fourth century, though doubtless Christian anchorites took refuge in caves, under no religious Order, from the beginning of our era. Of these four, I visited two others—Dehr Suriáni and Dehr Anba Bishoi—on my return journey.

They resemble one another so closely, and have been so fully described, that I need not linger over details. Practically, they are fortresses, with high stone walls, capable of withstanding a siege by Arabs, to which they have often been subjected: self-dependent and secure retreats for the Coptic monks who live a communistic life in prayer, idleness, and absolute seclusion, until released by death, when others take their place. Churches; buildings of all kinds;

block-houses, well-stored with provisions as a last resort in case the defenders are driven into them; and gardens, with deep wells from which sweet water is drawn up by *sakkieh* worked by oxen, are entirely enclosed by high walls, leaving only one narrow



ENTRANCE TO DEHR MAKAR

entrance, about four feet in height, which can be blocked by rolling two granite mill-stones into the aperture.

These and other curious means of defence were very necessary for the monks, against roving bands of Arabs, until within only a few years ago, when an

Englishman was sent to work the natron deposits, and established order and security throughout the valley. The monks speak gratefully of the British Occupation and of Mr. Hooker, to whom the development of the local industry is due. But, by force of habit, they maintain the same precautions before admitting strangers within their gates.

On ringing the bell, a monk appeared at the top of the parapet, and inquired our purpose. This known, he retired, with a muttered phrase that sounded unlike a benediction; and, shortly afterwards, the *Kummus*, or abbot, arrived, appearing mysteriously round the angle of the wall, to interview us. After compliments, we were permitted to enter through the heavy iron-bound door, the laborious opening of which recalled a scene in the Middle Ages. Abdul and his brother accompanied me into the guest room, where *eau sucrée* and coffee were produced.

Over the cigarettes, the *Kummus* was communicative. He asserted that Dehr Makar was the most ancient of the monasteries, and that its revenues and resources were derived chiefly from land of which he was the owner; that there were thirty monks in seclusion, who worked during the day and prayed at night; and that they were quite contented with their lot. Formerly, if a monk was caught outside by the Waled Ali, or other nomad Arabs, he was maltreated, and the clothes were taken off his back; but now,

thanks to the police force at the Lakes, their persons and their property were secure.

After visiting the churches and inspecting this curious colony of Coptic lazybodies, towards whose support I gave a small donation, much against my conscience, we returned to camp.

In our absence, the wind, blowing hard the whole time, had increased in violence. During the night it blew half-a-gale in force, from the north-west, accompanied by heavy rain.

My tent, though quite new and very comfortable, was unsuitable for the rough-and-tumble work of desert-travel: it was one of those ornamental Egyptian tents which one associates with garden-parties and afternoon tea. Pitched on loose sand, the tent-pegs and supports were insecure, and offered slight resistance to the strong wind that was blowing. Consequently, I had to exercise considerable ingenuity and to employ every available means to guard against disaster.

Cases and portmanteaus were piled against the ribs of the tent, inside, up to windward, and sticks were utilized as braces to ease the weight of the wind's impact; other boxes and heavy stones held the tent-pegs in the yielding sand.

For hours I remained up, watching my contrivances as the engineer his dams in the Delta of the Nile at high-flood; for hours I was bombarded by wind and

rain and volleys of sand. The ground rocked and shivered as a screw-racing steamer labouring in a head-sea. Rain fell in torrents and lashed the tent like the swish of spray against a ship's side. Canvas flapped, and flouted all attempts at conversation; whilst the roar of the wind kept up a constant cannonade. Several times I expected the tent to be swept away; thrice I had to summon help: when three of the men tumbled in to my whistle-call, looking very sleepy and rather cross, but finding shelter and cigarettes as compensation. Abdul, Abd-el-Gade, Saïd, and I leant against the bulging canvas—the former falling asleep occasionally—until five o'clock in the morning; when, the wind slightly abating, I finally dismissed my attendants, and, fully clothed, fell asleep despite the racket.

Three hours after sunrise, the rain ceased; and I seized this opportunity to strike camp. We moved under the lee of the high walls of the monastery, and awaited events. The churlish monks neither offered us shelter nor sent to inquire how we had passed the night. There we waited until noon, in the hope of the wind abating.

This prospect not being realized, I gave the order to march. Neither men nor camels cared to face the wind, which blew the sand in our faces in stinging slaps; but our course lay in that direction, and I was determined to find firmer camping-ground than the soft

sand round Dehr Makar. This we secured after a march of ten miles to the west.

During the whole of the day the wind continued to blow with force, and rain fell intermittently; but the necessity for making progress drove us against it. Camels get excited in a high wind; and mine became perfectly frantic when, dropping behind to re-arrange my *kuffir*, or Arab head-dress, we lost sight of the caravan in the sandstorm.

At nightfall the wind dropped, as I had predicted; and the next day broke fine and bright, with every promise of good weather. The superiority of our camping-ground over that of the previous night, and the fulfilment of my weather-forecast, having justified my pretensions as a leader, gave the men food for reflection. They had little else to cheer their spirits or to support them against the inclement weather. High winds were to be expected at that season of the year, when *khamsins* prevail; but one resented rain in the Libyan Desert as an intolerable anachronism.

We were then in the region of *hashish*—a generic name which my Arabs applied to the various forms of desert vegetation, though they knew each variety under its correct vernacular designation. Over this tempting ground the camels fondly dawdled, and would have been encouraged by the men to malinger, had I not sternly set my face against it.

The *hashish* question was the only one in which I

found the men slothful to obey; since it was often a nice point as to whether it was more important for the camels to feed, and to what extent, or for us to hasten on our way. Camels will eat of *hashish* until they can eat no more. They will stop at every tuft that they can decently pass on the march, so cunning are they; but no sooner do they gain the liberty of a halt, and are turned adrift to brouse, than they sit down and leer at you for your folly.

One day's march was like another. The Arabs and Abyssinian of our party were silent, or talked in decorous tones; only the Felláhin, after their kind, chattered for chattering's sake. The younger Fellah, whom I designated as Lower Egypt, was the songster of our company; but, fortunately, his ambition to pass as an Arab, when he happened to remember it, usually hushed his voice. Upper Egypt very rarely felt called upon to sing, being a surly giant; but, when he attempted to do so, his gruff complaining voice was execrable. The monotonous chant of Abd-el-Gade, the guide, softly hummed to himself, in rhythmic procession with his footsteps, was a lullaby in comparison.

No particular order of march was observed. The nature of the ground, the conditions of pace and speed, determined whether the camels should be allowed to straggle, cropping at the bushes in their path, or be tied up in caravan-style. The camel carrying the water-

barrels and skins, being the most trustworthy and experienced of all, was often allowed to walk apart; and, with its long neck craned forward, it always prèserved a true line of march, occasionally looking round to correct its direction or halting to allow the others to over-



HEAVY LOADS

take it. Abu, too, when not hanging on to a pack—his usual practice—preferred to walk alone. Abdul, on the other hand, as headman, was the friend of all and dispensed his favours impartially. The others, with the exception of the guide, who marched some distance ahead, took up their positions at the side of their

camels or gathered in groups for conversation and light badinage.

The utmost good fellowship prevailed: often two friends would stroll together, like children, hand in hand or resting on each other's shoulder. They were for the most part a good-natured, light-hearted set of men, accustomed to privations and hard walking, taking good things and bad as they came.

To march all day, and to lie down and sleep on the spot where they halted for the night, were in the order of things for which they were not responsible. To eat bread and cheese, or any other delicacy that came to hand without much trouble, and to drink water, good or bad as it happened to be; or to do without these, if need be, depended not so much on themselves as on an over-ruling Providence. 'What God wills, happens; what He does not will, shall not happen.' This is their creed. Predestination breeds fine soldiers but poor logicians. If troubles come, these are dismissed from their mind with a word that sums up their faith and characterises their manhood—*ma' lèsh!* It is a word, the meaning of which is so comprehensive that it can only be translated by a clumsy phrase: 'Do not worry about it: it does not matter: nothing matters!'

For myself, when not with the caravan, the observation of which was an inexhaustible source of interest, I ranged ahead or fell behind as fancy prompted. The

faithful Saïd was never very far away, if not actually leading my camel; and either he or his brother came promptly to the call of my whistle.

Luncheon at noon, in the broiling sun, involved a



WHEN THE DAY'S MARCH IS OVER

brief halt, the briefer the better, and gave but little refreshment. The afternoon hours were the hardest travelling: going west, the glare of the sun and shimmering desert, full in one's face, was, in the absence of wind, exhausting to brain and body alike. But in the early stages of our journey a gentle breeze, coming like the caress of a loved hand, helped one to

bear the burden and heat of the day. Nature, though hard, is not inexorable.

Long before the time came to camp for the night, wistful eyes would seek mine in an interrogative glance, anticipating the order to halt. Occasionally Abu, the rascal, would call my attention to the westering sun; but I, ignoring his comments, expressed or unexpressed, on the position of the heavenly body, would stare stonily ahead, and murmur "*ma' lèsh!*" It was of importance to pitch camp in proximity to vegetation, where such existed, for the refreshment of the camels; and for that, but for no other, reason we often halted before our tale of miles had been tramped.

A cup of tea, at the end of the day's march, when the sun had sunk below the horizon and our camp was hushed—the first brief respite from toil—was my chief gratification; and preceded by two hours the cook's creations, which supplied the principal meal of the day. The interval was employed in writing up my diary and plotting my route-map, unless other and more urgent duties intervened—such as, filtering water, doctoring the men, or interviewing the guide and dragoman. In most cases I had to burn the midnight oil whilst the camp was buried in the profound silence of the desert.

CHAPTER V

MOGHARA

It took us four-and-a-half days to reach Moghara, from Dehr Makar, a distance of only seventy-six miles, as the crow flies. Here we first encountered some of the accidents of travel in the desert, though slight in comparison with those which subsequently befell us.

The camels had refused to drink at Dehr Makar, owing to the high wind. Having so recently been nourished on clover, our easy stages to the Wadi Natrun had not exhausted them. But now their heavy packs and the hot weather—about 92° Fahr. in the shade at noon—began to tell upon them. They were greatly overladen, and two of them kept constantly dropping, causing delays. Nor were the men in the hard condition which time developed; and, remembering what was before them, I did not care to drive them. Indeed, so indulgent was I, that I earned their commendation, which perhaps was a reproach, as expressed to me by Abdul: 'The camelmen, they say you very good master, you very nice gentleman.'

Abu, though tough as an old goose, and about as

wise, had started on this long journey with only one pair of shoes, the soles of which were broken; and this was all his foot-gear: consequently, I had to provide him with what I could spare and to doctor his sore feet. Nor were the other men much better off, with the inprovidence that characterises them. It was no use giving them things: they only hoarded these, and went on as before. I presented them each with a silk handkerchief, as a protection against the sun, but they were never worn; with kammerbands, which they only produced on rare occasions; and later, on arrival at Siwa, to each man I gave a new pair of shoes for the return journey, but only two of them ever wore those shoes, though their own were dropping from their feet. Such a feckless, callous lot were they, as regarded their personal comfort, that sometimes I felt inclined to shake them: but I remembered their poverty, which was extreme, and could scarcely insist on the production of my own presents. They never thanked me for the gifts I sent them through Abdul, until one day, when I asked whether this was the Arab custom, I was bombarded by excessive recognition; and on all subsequent occasions I received an extravagant *Kattakhîrak*, which Arabs use in a cynical sense more frequently than as a simple expression of thanks.

The stock of Abdul's gun having been smashed, I mended it, eliciting exclamations of wonder and admiration from him, so incapable was he, himself, of using

his hands. In fact, I had to perform all the light carpentry jobs. Apart from their camels, the ignorance and stupidity of these men were profound, so far as I had any opportunity of judging.

Another mishap, which, though apparently trifling,



ABU'S NOTION OF TRAVELLING

was not so, considering our position, was the breaking of our one and only corkscrew. Not to speak of other bottles, whose necks could not be broken, the Rosbach Water, 100 pints of which I carried in two cases, was my most precious possession ; and a crippled corkscrew was therefore a serious matter. However, that cork-

screw was mended with string, and served to the end of the journey. Trifles such as this loom up large in the desert, where consequences are apt to prove out of all proportion to their cause.

By degrees we fell into the routine of serious travel. Each day the bonds of discipline were drawn tighter. I rose half-an-hour before sunrise, and, breakfast over, hurried the men (or was myself hurried by them) in the operations of breaking camp. More often than the reverse, I regret to say, the men were fussing about outside my tent, anxious for admittance, whilst I was at breakfast or packing up my things; usually, the canteen tent was down and rolled up by the time I emerged from mine: but sometimes I was before them, and, conscious of virtue, supervised their laggard preparations. We started as near seven o'clock as possible.

Abu, the Turk, was in the habit of planting the empty bottles of Rosbach in the hole made by my tent-pole. Usually, I left two of these at each camp. If I caught him at this operation, he would look up, with a wan smile, which I interpreted to mean: 'how happy I could be with either!' I do not believe he meant merely to mark the site of our camp. The function was too solemn, too inevitable: it partook of the nature of last rites, performed before the weary pilgrimage of the day. With an easy conscience, he would then roam ahead, alone, so as

to get the start of us, perhaps also to munch in peace the products of his pilferings.

Our course lay over many inequalities of surface, which the desert here assumes under the form of *wadis*; but in the main we traversed level expanses of sand, covered with gravel or strewn with small dark pebbles, the product of sand and wind action. Between Dehr Makar and Moghara there is plenty of *hashish* for the camels, and, especially in the Wadi Moghara, quantities of agatized wood. Clumps of tree-trunks or of roots, done into stone, were frequently encountered, and in many places large petrified trees, some of which measured from sixty to ninety feet in length, as they lay half-buried in the sand. We also picked up, in the Wadi Moghara, several large pieces of geyser-tubes—the blow-holes of hot vapours formed in early Tertiary times. These and other physical features of the desert I shall describe in another place.

The gale of wind that attacked us at Dehr Makar died hard. The second day out, it still blew fresh from the north-west, with a falling temperature, and, being a head-wind, caused us some discomfort, as we were in the region of sand-dunes. On the third day it dropped, and the temperature rose. And on the fourth day the weather became intolerably hot.

We were then in the Wadi Moghara, an extensive depression which, from some points of view, has all the appearance of a desiccated lake or dry river-bed. At

one spot, fifty feet above the last and largest trough into which we descended, at noon on March 22, we had a glorious view over twenty miles of desert. Coast-line and promontories were there, to all appearance, thrown into strong relief by the vast sea-like plain, the clouds casting deep-blue shadows along the distant horizon. But, as we descended and the desert was lighted by the glowing sun, we found nought but dreary wastes of fine sand covered with small stones.

On the day of our arrival at Moghara we were twelve hours on the road. It was our hardest day's march, up to that time.

There was no wind to mitigate the fierce heat of the sun (102° Fahr.), and barely a passing breeze to fan us. The camels had had no water for seven or eight days, and were exhausted, our *bête noire* in particular dropping constantly to its knees and, with many a groan of protest and complaint, sinking deep into the sand. Some of the men were getting foot-sores; and Abu had to be mounted on one of the camels. Though fatigued myself, I, on this as on many previous and subsequent occasions, could not resist the pleading eyes of the cook, as he trudged wearily in the pool of shade cast by one of the pack-animals, to which he clung; and either dismounted myself for his benefit or caused him to be accommodated on one of the other camels. We were a silent party

that day, and were not cheered even by the mirages that heralded our approach to water. The camels, with outstretched necks, whimpered their desire as they scented the air. Night fell, and still we plodded on by the margin of the reed-covered oasis, until, in the dim darkness, we sighted the salt-lake, near which we camped.

No sooner had we arrived than we were fiercely assailed by a cloud of mosquitoes. It was a veritable plague. The camels were frantic, throwing themselves on their side and on their back, as soon as they were relieved of the loads, and kicking viciously. In the gathering darkness, the turmoil was indescribable.

We ourselves were no better off. My tent was pitched hurriedly; but it was impossible to enter: the mosquitoes were too dense in it. The noise of their buzzing was so loud that, outside my tent, it sounded like the distant cheers of a vast crowd, coming in continuous waves of enthusiasm; and inside it resembled the whistle of the wind through telegraph wires.

Throwing my mattress on the sand, I lay there, enshrouded, like the veiled prophet of Khorassan, in a mosquito net, with gloves on my hands. I could not eat; I could not smoke; the canteen tent had not been pitched. I killed mosquitoes in handfuls, muttering appropriate epitaphs.

Happily, a breeze sprang up, and scattered the warring hosts. Freshening as the night advanced, the wind eventually rid us of our tormentors. But as a forlorn hope of these noxious and noisy insects had cunningly taken refuge in my tent, and we were all too tired to chase them away, I preferred to sleep outside.

We had been eight days on the road; and I was anxious to hasten our journey. In any case, I had intended to give the men and camels half-a-day's rest; but the severity of the sandstorm that overtook us at Moghara detained us a whole day.

CHAPTER VI

A SANDSTORM

Moghara is an important place of call for caravans in the Libyan Desert. Properly speaking, it is an oasis, wholly uncultivated, and therefore devoid of palm-trees. Water here comes to the surface, in the shape of a salt-lake, round the margin of which and for some distance along an adjacent trough there grow quantities of high reeds: hence its other name, Wadi es-Sumá, 'the valley of rushes.' Out of these reeds are manufactured the famous *menufi* mats, the best of their kind. It is said that wild boar harbour in the rushes; but I fancy their existence is apocryphal.

For some distance around Moghara there are numerous clumps of desert vegetation—*hashish* as I may be permitted to call it, generically—growing, as elsewhere in the desert, in tufts, off which the gazelles brouse peacefully. And over a wide area, water, sweet water, lies so near to the surface, that one has only to shovel away the sand for a depth of two or three feet in order to reach it.

With the exception of these insignificant patches of

vegetation and the blue splash of colour reflected by the lakelet, the sand is everywhere obtrusive, encroaching in the south-west as mighty dunes, range upon range.

It is a spot visited by many caravans; and in the summer it is the home of large numbers of Waled Ali Arabs, with their flocks and herds, who migrate thither from the winter pastures on the Coastal Plateau. But when we were there, the place was deserted.

On the night of our arrival, the wind, which had scattered the mosquitoes, increased in force. The camels had been unable to get water, owing to the only hole we found having been choked with sand. The men therefore opened another; but this also was filled up by the driving sand. At dawn it was blowing a regular *khamsin*, from the south-west.

The camel with her calf having strayed, they were lost in the sandstorm; and all hands were out hunting for them. Eventually, they were recovered.

After an ineffectual attempt at a bath, owing to the risk of the tent collapsing on me, I formed a resolution, and summoned the guide and the dragoman.

'How long will it take,' I asked them, 'to reach Gara, travelling not less than eight hours a day?'

'Six days.'

'Good. That is my calculation, too. And from Gara to Siwa?'

'Three days, or three-and-a-half.'

'So I imagined. Therefore, let us say ten days from Moghara to Siwa, bar accidents and delays?' This, with an indulgent smile.

'*Quies.*'

It was hard lines having two sandstorms and so much rain during the first eight days of our journey; and the delays were beginning to make me sad: but there was no help for it. I decided to remain another day where we were, it being too late to hurry through our preparations and not worth while to hasten on our way. Besides, there was the sandstorm to reckon with.

A *khamsin* is about the greatest infliction that travellers in the desert have to encounter. It is a fierce, hot wind from the south or south-west. Sweeping over the arid wastes of the Sahara, it carries clouds of dust in its train. The atmosphere is so dense with sand-particles, that you are enveloped in the murkiness of a yellow fog. Sand pervades everywhere and everything: it engrosses your five senses, bar none. It rapidly covers every object with a yellow shroud, which in time may become a winding-sheet; it penetrates the smallest interstices, and respects neither the sanctity of your person nor the most secret of your pockets. You breathe sand.

If you seek shelter in your tent, your comfort is not greatly enhanced. The wind tears at the supports and shakes your flimsy covering with a giant's grasp. So doubtful is its stability, that it is safer always to be

prepared for the worst, sitting on your luggage, ready packed, as if waiting for your cab. If you leave open your trunk or your bag for a few moments, it is at once filled with fine sand. You are therefore constantly packing and unpacking, to get at every trifle.

All this might be borne with resignation, even with cheerfulness, were it not for another malignant feature of the situation. A *khamsin* is not merely a hot wind: it slowly bakes you—not badly, of course, but enough to make you feel that you are facing an open oven. Gloves, therefore, are necessary, unless, if there is room in your pockets, you prefer to thrust your hands into the hot sand reposing there. As for your face, it is better covered; and goggles should shield your eyes.

In the shelter of your tent you might expect to find sanctuary. This is not the case. Everything is hot to the touch. Your skin is parched and tender. A raging thirst consumes you. For the moment, you would sacrifice everything to satisfy it; not with wine or alcoholic drinks, but rather with a draught of sparkling mineral-water: and if your stock of this is low, or even limited, every drop seems more precious than jewels. As for the musty liquid that the desert offers as water, no amount of it would satisfy you, unless you had the cubic and other capacity of the camel. To drink too much is dangerous; but to drink enough is not only a pure joy—free of all grossness, almost of spiritual

satisfaction—it is also a necessity: else would you be mummified. I suppose I drank enough, since I survived the experience, but I did not consider so at the time: I was saving up my drinks for Jarabub. I dwelt on the pathos of that crippled corkscrew, and knew then that I had been wise to refuse to part with it—all bottles having, since its accident, been brought to me for opening. It must be terrible torture to die of thirst.

Other thoughts crowded on me as I lay gasping in that enervating atmosphere. Never before had I sufficiently appreciated the glorious privilege of a cold bath. My mind rocked and refused to contemplate the heavenly bliss of a plunge into deep water. Nor did I dare to dwell on the satisfaction, carnal it may be, of subsequently sitting down to table—a white-damasked, silver-strewn table—in the cool attire of evening clothes. There are compensations in being a rate-payer, even under the London County Council.

Outside, the sand was being gradually heaped up, burying the large cases that held the tent-pegs in position. Only Abdul and Abu were in the canteen tent. The other men were having a jolly time, with the camels. They dug two holes, both of which filled up; and, on the wind abating, they excavated a third, the water in which was allowed to clarify during the night.

I took two or three snapshots of the storm, with the result—there was no other—that my camera jambed:

i.e., fine grains of sand entered and stopped the mechanism. I had to take a portion of it to pieces, some days afterwards, in order to discover and repair the mischief; and during that anxious process my men had rather a rough time of it.

And so the day and the *khamsin* came to an end.

CHAPTER VII

THE DESERT

THE Libyan Desert has enjoyed its distinctive name from time immemorial. There is no earthly reason why, physically speaking, it should be so distinguished. It forms part of the great Sahara, which dominates North Africa, from the Atlantic to the Red Sea—a world in itself, although its characteristics are reproduced, almost within identical latitudes, in a deep zone girdling the Earth.

Where the Libyan Desert precisely begins, and where it ends, it would be difficult to determine: but, for our present purpose, and in accordance with scientific and other considerations that need not be specified here, it may be said to begin at Moghara and to extend, past Siwa, to the oasis of Aujila, the nodal point of trans-Saharan caravans. From the shores of the Mediterranean it prevails far southwards, in ever deepening desolation, until the higher and inhabited lands are reached. In no region of the Sahara are desert conditions more absolute: in the heart of the Libyan Desert, animal and even insect life is impossible.

Our route lay along a vast trough or comparative depression in the Libyan Desert, between Lower Egypt and the Gulf of Sidra, in which Siwa and other spots actually lie below the sea-level. In the north is the Coastal Plateau, with elevations ranging from 300 feet to 600 feet, and from 600 feet to 1,600 feet, which we skirted for the greater part of the way; in the south is the domain of dunes, 300 feet high, into which no caravan dare penetrate.

I understand the popular idea of the desert to be: that it is uniformly a level expanse of sand, over which caravans may wander in any direction, though there are no inhabitants and few wells; and that it is awfully hot. This view of the Sahara is imperfect in many respects. The desert is not so yellow as it is painted. Its surface is diversified, moulded even into mountains in some places, where there are inhabitants; caravans can pass over only a few well-known tracts, to leave which is to risk being engulfed by the sand; there are wells, few in number it is true, but water can in many places be tapped (particularly in the *wadis* and close to high land) at comparatively inconsiderable depths; and, although it is 'awfully hot,' it is also 'beastly cold.'

Between Moghara and Gara, a journey of seven days, we passed through the worst part of our route, which was marked by heaps of camel-bones, at close intervals, and the graves of men. Many caravans have

perished in this part of the Sahara. And here, for the first time, I realized the desert in all its terror, in all its sullen exclusiveness.

Before continuing the narrative of my journey, it may be desirable to impart some of these impressions



A DIP IN THE DESERT

to the reader, in order to limit subsequent digressions and to convey a general conception of the desert in its most characteristic aspects.

My map illustrates only the general character of the country through which we passed. It will be seen that our route, indicated by a red line, was along the

beds of *wadis* or across them, as far as Moghara; that it then struck across the open desert to Gara, our nearest approach to the Coastal Plateau; and that, from Gara to our destination, it led over a tongue of high land adjoining the Plateau, and dipped into the depression which unites with the oasis of Siwa.

Obviously, therefore, we were frequently ascending or descending land-elevations, which, in the region of the Coastal Plateau, were of respectable altitude. On the lip of a wadi, one's vision ranges over a wide expanse, the embossment of which can be distinguished; but in the trough of the depression this is hidden from one, and the minor irregularities of surface become prominent.

Throughout the greater part of the desert traversed by our caravan, the ground is broken up into a series of shallow basins, many of which cover a very limited area. More rarely than one would suppose, we encountered vast stretches of absolutely level desert, through which our progress seemed painfully slow. Near the Coastal Plateau or other high elevations of land, many of which, isolated or connected with the table-land, we passed, there were always features in the landscape to relieve the monotony of the arid plain. And the nearer the Plateau is approached, the greater is the diversity of surface-features.

There is a regular gradation, or degradation, of

land-forms[1] known to the geographer under their distinctive Arabic names. Abutting on the Plateau are the *hammáda*, or elevated desert covered with rock-boulders and large stones, the surface of which is very irregular and broken. The adjoining *serîr* are



LIKE A DESICCATED INLAND SEA

similar in character, only that they lie lower and are covered with smaller rocks and stones. Beyond these

[1] The rocks chiefly encountered are sandstone and limestone. As regards the geology of the Libyan Desert, into which I need not enter, it may be briefly mentioned that, to the Nubian sandstone succeed, in successive layers, from N.N.W. to S.S.E., the upper chalk, mummelite sandstone, and the more recent Tertiary formations, full of fossil wealth, such as we saw at Siwa.

are vast plains, more or less level. Desert, desert everywhere: and not a drop to drink!

For the most part, the ground is covered with the scourings and detritus of harder rocks than that which is reduced to fine particles of sand or those in an earlier stage of disintegration. Small stones are scattered and spread by the wind, forming in many parts, where these are large enough to be distinguished by the eye, a beautiful mosaic, as if each stone had been deliberately placed into position. In other places the desert is uniformly powdered by still smaller particles. The eye is in either case relieved from the intense glare of the yellow sand: a provision of Nature which is greatly appreciated by the traveller. The most exhausting portion of the journey was when we were passing over loose and level sand, such as one sees at our own seaside resorts, bounded by an infinite horizon that encircled our puny caravan as if we were lost in the bed of a desiccated inland sea. Such regions, though rare, were not infrequently encountered: and it was then one felt the desert in all its loneliness.

The silence of the desert is the silence of the tomb: palpable in its profundity. In the absence of wind there is no agency to break the stillness of death that prevails: no men, no animals, no birds, no insects even, and no vegetation. No law but Natural Law. Nothing living, nothing moving, nothing feeling. Only oneself:

the centre of the universe, so to speak. In the day-time, 100 yards from the caravan, one can realize all this and more ; at night-time, one feels like ‘the man in the moon.’ It is glorious!

No wonder your nomad Arab is a gentleman by



CURIOUS ROCK AT GARA

instinct and a raider by profession! He is a product of the desert. The Lord gave; and the Lord has taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord!

The desert, though brutal in its exclusiveness, is gentle as a mother to the forms of life admitted to its sanctuary; but its face is hard set against migra-

tory movements. It covers, as with a mantle of sand, and thereby protects, animals from their natural enemies, providing sustenance for them out of invisible sources. The sterility of the desert sternly forbids the invasion of man, though in many directions there are highways along which he may pass, from one distant habitation or oasis to another, by the aid of a beast of burden fitted in all respects for desert-travel. Water comes to the surface, or percolates through the rock at a few feet below, providing at certain localities the necessary refreshment for camels and caravans.

Between Cairo and the Natron Valley, and between Moghara and Gara, the desert is less hospitable than in the other parts of our route, where a scanty vegetation is found, sufficient to nourish camels between one water-hole or well and another. True, one may go a whole day or two days without finding more than a few bushes of *hashish*, or only an occasional tuft of stunted and parched grass. But in many parts there are large areas along the line of march, particularly near the wells and water-holes, where low bushes of desert vegetation—*nebárt* (the correct name for *hashish*), *táfa* (tamarisk), *wartum* (*convolvulus lanatus?*) and many other species—grow in clumps and in patches. Each bush is itself isolated, as if fighting for existence unaided; but where many are in close proximity—frequently on slight elevations of soft sand, upon which

the rain of stones does not encroach—these have the appearance and something of the permanence of a pasture.

The roots of the bushes are of great age, because they go on growing as the sand covers them. In England, a tree or plant has roots only as deep in the ground as its height above it. In the desert, roots extend to surprising depths. Thus, Schweinfurth states that he has known a tamarisk to have roots reaching 150 feet below the surface: a fact which explains the appearance of vegetation in regions where there is practically no rain and apparently no water. Many of these desert plants, especially the fleshy ones, have the power of storing and retaining their water-supply, in bulbs and tubers; and this they derive either from the humidity above or the moisture below the surface of the ground.

With the exception of what the Arabs called *hashish Rhazali*, which bears a yellow pod, none of the desert vegetation we passed was in flower save a low thorny bush that Saïd called *wartum*. This, the least attractive of all, had a white bell-shaped flower, and was of a gray ashen colour, as if burnt by fire.

Graceful gazelles wander, singly or in company, from one patch of vegetation to another, from one water-hole to the next. We saw a great many gazelles; and their sinuous, trefoil tracks in the sand intersected

our route in all directions; but, except on one occasion,[1] we never surprised the vigilance of these timid creatures: usually, we caught glimpses of them, flying from us in a straight line, miles away. These, with the exception of a few wolves, one of which we shot, were the only wild animals we saw. Very rarely we met white rats, and rabbits resembling hares, in the *hashish*, whilst all along our route there were any number of scorpions. Moths and insects were encountered, even the ubiquitous house-fly, in the oases, and often singly, as wanderers, in the open desert: some of these accompanied us, for our sins.

Bird life was represented chiefly by the migrants: a few flights of wild geese and one of quail. But occasionally a bird of gay plumage, or a lost swallow, would crave our hospitality, which was not given in powder and shot. Of birds of prey we saw one only, on an appropriate occasion, as the sequel will show.

Reptiles there were, all poisonous, a few of which we killed; but these were chiefly in the oases. At Siwa there were cobras, whose acquaintance we did not make. In selecting a camp, I always looked out for snakes and scorpions. Two of the former sought the shelter of my tent, and found sudden death; I objected also to the holes of scorpions under my bed. The latter, when

[1] When the leading camel of our caravan, walking free, actually bit at a young gazelle, lying asleep on the sand. I did not witness the incident, being out of sight, behind: but my men told me that they had not time to fire, so rapidly did the gazelle escape.

confronted by a man, are paralysed by fright, and are easily destroyed.

The Libyan Desert is an area of high-pressure in the winter, the winds blowing outwards; but our line of route lay under the countervailing influence of the Mediterranean: hence the storms of wind and rain from the north-west, which, judging by the trails of sand on the lee-side of all bushes, appeared to be the prevailing wind. At the same time, we were travelling in the season when *khamsins* rage: but their boisterous disturbance did not prevail in this respect against the more constant zephyrs.

The mean temperature of this region is said to be from 7° to 10° lower than in the cultivated lands of Egypt. Between the coldest and warmest month there is a difference of only 29° Fahr.; but the diurnal range is enormous. The absolute minimum, noted by explorers, is 23°, water often freezing at night; the absolute maximum about 160° Fahr. The greatest diurnal range I experienced was 50° (42°–92°). Fahr. The air is dry, and there is no dew. The mean relative humidity, in winter, is 50°, or about 4° higher than in the Sahara proper.

Dr. Canney states that the effect of cultivation is to cause a drop in the temperature just before sunset and to maintain this fall for two or three hours after: that, presumably, the nights are colder in cultivated areas than in the desert. This certainly was my experience

at Siwa. The temperature of the desert, too, is more uniform, and less liable to sudden variations, than over cultivated land. The curve is more gradual, owing to the absence of mist: at sunrise it is sudden and sharp in its upward movement, but at the moment of sunset there is absolutely no drop in the temperature, in spite of the nervous sensation of chill. The percentage of ozone in the air is higher than at sea. The air is so bracing and free of all germs, that the Libyan Desert may be regarded as one of the healthiest regions in the whole world.

Dawn in the desert is very beautiful. In the clear atmosphere, the coming day heralds its approach in flames of fire, which whiten and brighten as the sun reaches the horizon: the whiter and brighter, the hotter the day. The warm sun-rays rapidly disperse the lingering gloom of night; and when the sun passes the zone of roseate haze and mounts into the clear blue sky, the temperature of the air leaps upward, in sympathy with the glowing orb.

The first hour after sunrise is the most delightful in the whole day. There is then rarely, if ever, any wind. It is just cool enough to enjoy a light wrap or cloak over one's shoulders. The air is so light and exhilarating, so fresh and scented, that, however bad and broken one's rest may have been during the night, one feels invigorated and braced to meet the fatigues of the ensuing day's march.

The hours before noon are bearable enough; but as hour succeeds hour, and the sun declines, the heat becomes intolerable, unless it be mitigated by cooling breezes. Mounted on a camel, one escapes the fiercest reflection though not the radiation of the burning sun; and one gets all the air that is going: but one's whole time, at least during the hottest hours of the day, seems to be passed in seeking shelter from the pitiless heat or in wooing the gentle breezes. In bad weather, especially in high winds, one is equally engrossed in this pursuit, which kills time but precludes literary work, unless one is hardened against climatic influences. The motion of the camel, too, though one readily becomes accustomed to it, makes writing an effort that is inadequately redeemed by the hieroglyphic results.

Though the sun glorifies and renders seductive the desert in its plainest guise, one misses the transparent shadows of large objects. Practically there is no shade in the open desert, except that cast by the caravan. The clouds, chiefly cirrus, give little or none; and that little is very elusive. I remember only once passing through the shadow of a cloud. Stealing across the desert, like the Angel of Death, it fairly met us, face to face, and, enmeshing us with its intangible gauze, passed swiftly on its way. I have experienced a similar sensation when, in the car of a balloon, I have passed through a dry cloud: but that was colourless vapour,

whilst the deep-blue veil had a subtle charm that only can be appreciated by those who have wandered for weeks in a shadowless desert.

The phenomenon of mirage was our constant companion, affording endless speculation and a never-failing source of interest. We saw it at all hours of the day and on all sides; but more particularly at the meridian hours, or between eleven and three, in the direct path of the sun: that is to say, when and where the sun's rays were fiercest. I have spoken of the cup-shaped depressions through which we were constantly passing. On rising to the crest of one of these, the moment the crest of the succeeding depression became visible, it was blurred and broken up to our vision by the shimmer of heated air that intervened. This gave the effect of running water, and, by the obstruction of one's view, broke up the outline into the semblance of trees and islands. But this was only a minor manifestation, and not true mirage. Of mirage, due to refraction, we were constantly seeing examples of lake and coast scenery near the horizon—bold promontories and rocky coasts, with vast sheets of water washing their base; islands and palm-groves—but of inverted images, ships and other objects foreign to the desert, we observed nothing, although I was always on the outlook for these. Frequently, too, we saw large pools of water and swamps far ahead or even in the middle-distance, through which we subsequently passed dry-

shod. Nothing in the character of the desert or its slope, when examined, accounted for the illusion. Salt-crystals there were, and polished stones, and slopes that might conceivably reflect the blue sky, at our angle of sight: but these were everywhere, and not in one place more than another.

And so, in speculations of this character, in studying the camel and its peculiar characteristics (of which I shall speak in another chapter), in watching my men—in short, seizing any opportunity to occupy my mind, the long day comes to an end. The sun sinks below the horizon, fiery red or in a haze of white, betokening another hot day, but very rarely behind a bank of clouds. Of fine sunset effects, I remember chiefly the wonderful after-glows.

At night, when the camp is hushed in silence, no sound being heard but that of camels chewing the cud or the jingle of their head-stalls, it is pleasant to walk apart.

The stars overhead float in deepest space, and are blue or white in the light they shed forth, until the moon rises in her splendour and quenches their brilliance. Then is the landscape bathed in a luminous glory that is a poem of colour.

Requiescat in pace! The desert is peopled with ghosts, the spirits of those who lead the way to the Great Oasis. Some walk sorrowfully, glancing backwards; others jubilantly, as if towards a goal. Who shall interpret their gaze?

Death and Life are symbolized in Nature by the Desert and the Oasis.

Those who have seen their loved ones pass from them, from the many-tongued city into the silent desert where Death rules, cherish the hope that an oasis may



ROCK-TOMB AT GARA

be not far distant. Where one shall go, another may follow. And though, in the desert, there be many oases, and therefore many ways, in the end there is but one way and one oasis. Each man must choose his way or have it chosen for him: each may people his temporary oasis and fashion it as seemeth best to him:

but the Oasis of Reunion lies beyond the horizon of human intelligence.

What we see is mirage; what we know is nothing: our faith is but the reflection of human justice. Death is brutal. The soul of man cries aloud for comfort: and is answered by mocking sprites. Though his faith be stronger than his reason, he needs must journey with the spirits to find spiritual conviction. And the ghosts daunt him.

No wonder he hesitates to plunge into the Desert! No wonder he trembles on the threshold, cozening his conscience into compliance with the conditions he cannot control!

Did he truly believe, he would go gladly, even as the bridegroom who seeks his beloved bride.

CHAPTER VIII

IN DEEPEST DESERT

EXTRACTS from Diary:

'*Moghara: Friday, March* 25.—Broke camp at 7.15 A.M. Went to hole made in sand last night, and found the water had clarified. I filtered some for my own use; and we filled our barrels and waterskins.

'After passing over a series of high dunes, heaped up by the *khamsins*—under the lee of which we should have found shelter yesterday, if the guide had had the gumption to lead us there—we struck a westerly course; and, after travelling five miles over heavy sand, we sighted the Coastal Plateau. We were about eight to ten miles distant from the tableland, the margin of which we now skirt for most of the way to Gara. The heights look quite picturesque, in elevation about 1,000 to 1,500 feet. Elsewhere, and particularly in the south, an unmitigated desert: soft sand, no *hashish*, an horizon like the sea. The desert, in fact, becomes more uninteresting as we proceed west; though the wonderful atmospheric effects and colouring ennoble everything.

'To-day has been lovely, with a light breeze at times to temper the heat. The evening was perfect. But the men have been lazy; and I had to call them to order. They were going very slow after luncheon, and straggling: so I summoned Abdul to my side, and told him that a day's rest appeared to fatigue them more than a day's march; that we had done with our little pic-nic; and that, rain or shine, wind or no wind, we should have to travel twenty miles a day to Gara and Siwa. If they walked slow, or dangled, we should camp later.

'"*Quies.*"

'"Go, now, and tell the men what they have to expect. Personally, I prefer camping early. And, Abdul!"

'"Yessir."

'"It's a long way to Jarabub. Remember we are going to Jarabub."

'"I hep so."

'That is all the response I can ever get out of him. "I hep so," or "I hep not," meaning "hope," is his usual expression of opinion.

'All difficulties and dangers lie down, like mountains, as one approaches them. Any hesitation I may have felt, after reading and hearing the consensus of opinion as to the ghastly risks and impossibility of success, has passed away, now that I am facing the situation. I know full well what I am in for; but, having started, it

is a point of pride to succeed. Considering that all this country, up to Siwa, will probably be a British Protectorate within seven years' time, I don't feel like standing the exclusiveness of the Siwans. Jarabub is different, of course, being beyond the Egyptian frontier, as well as absolutely independent of the Sultan's suzerainty. But there is nothing like audacity to carry one through circumstances like these. Whether the men or camels will be able to go on to Jarabub, seems an equally doubtful matter: it is a long journey, altogether, there and back. The bad camel looks worse to-day; and I only hope it will carry its burden to Siwa, where another may be purchased. Fluffy, too, looks exhausted. [Fluffy was the name I gave to the baby camel.]

'Camp at 5.50 P.M. Done our tale of miles to-day, anyway.

'*Saturday, March* 26.—Early this morning I thought we were in for another delay. At 2.30 A.M. I was awakened by the wind—from the east, this time—and rain beating on my tent, the flap of which (facing the wind, as last night it was the lee-side) had given way, the great heat and dryness having rotted all the rope. If the wind had come in at the door, my precious belongings would have gone out of the window. So, as it was blowing hard, I got up and dressed; and then, after fixing up the tent-flap, lay down to sleep, ready for developments. Wind and rain continued off and

on, but got no worse. At 6.30, oversleeping myself, Abdul wakened me.

'It was still raining, though not heavily. After breakfast, we started in the rain, some of the men looking very miserable. It is extraordinary how the sun illumines the meanest details. To-day, our bedraggled caravan resembled a gypsy affair. Arabs in rain look like drowned rats : so different from their manly bearing and flowing robes in the sunlight. Still, it was deliciously cool ; and I enjoyed a little rain after the great heats : it reminded one of home.

'Before noon, the sun appeared again ; and it became very hot. Temperature, in afternoon, 92° Fahr. in the shade of my sketching-umbrella, on camelback ; 102° in the sun. [I could not swing the thermometer to get a truer shade-temperature, as mine had become loosened in its fastenings, owing to the heat.]

'We soon lost sight of the Plateau, and did not see it again, except faintly blue at points, all day. Our course led us across successive troughs : an interminable series of very slight depressions. Tufts of desert grass few and far between ; and only one clump of agatized wood encountered on the march.

'Abdul tried to intimidate me to-day against proceeding to Jarabub. I expected he would cool as the goal was approached : he has no stomach for such ventures, only a capacious pouch for the proceeds. The guide, it appears, told him that, four years ago, when

he himself was at Jarabub, whither he went to collect some money due to him, he heard that a European, disguised as an Arab and passing as a Mussulman, with an Arab following, had penetrated to within a short distance of Jarabub, where he was met by a party of Senussi horsemen, who killed him and massacred all his men. Whether this man of unknown nationality came from Cairo, Alexandria, or Benghazi, is not clear: upon this and other points I must examine the guide. Perhaps the whole story is faked up for my benefit? It seems that the ill-fated traveller had his eyes put out and his throat cut: a gruesome ending.

'Abdul admitted, however, that it was possible for us to get into Jarabub. He says, the Senussi would probably also allow us to depart in peace; but that they would assuredly send a party of men to intercept and massacre us on the road home. That is their little way, I know. But I tell Abdul that we have got to run a few risks for the glory that will invest us, in the event of success; and that the Senussi would gain nothing but trifling loot by such conduct: moreover, it is to their interest to lie low, and not to offend foreign Governments, particularly Egypt, by acts of brigandage and murder. Their time is not yet; and against small, irresponsible bands we can defend ourselves.

'The white-livered rascal replied that, here in the desert, a caravan is wiped out, and nobody is any the wiser. But I reminded him of his comfortable faith:

'"If that is your *bach* (fate), you cannot avert it. *Khalas!*" ("You have your dismissal.") I enjoy airing the few Arabic words and phrases that I have fagged up for the occasion.

'It appears that Abdul told the camelmen only to-day that we were going to Siwa, mentioning nothing about Jarabub; and that they did not fancy it, fearing the danger. But there is no turning back now. It is evident that fear of the Siwans is general. Egypt, of course, cannot exert a determining influence, in the event of local disturbances—the chronic state of their politics—with a mere handful of police, dumped down in an oasis nearly 400 miles distant from Cairo. Our reception depends entirely on the existing state of tension. Until we get to Siwa we can reckon on nothing.

'At Cairo, Abdul promised me to do everything in his power to promote the sole object of my journey, the expense and trouble of which cannot be redeemed at Siwa alone. His defection at this early stage is therefore very vexatious: but his *bakhshish* shall depend on his future behaviour. I have him there.

'*Sunday, March* 27.—We ought to have reached Ain Uara, the only water-hole on this march, last night. But there has been some dawdling on both the previous days; and again to-day the men allowed the camels to spread among the *hashish.* This may arise from my foolish arrangement, though I could make no other, of

paying so much a-day for the caravan. It looked as if they meant to spend a day over this job of getting fresh water at Ain Uara.

'I therefore called Abdul, who was strolling ahead, with the guide, and not looking after the caravan, as he should do; and I gave him a good dressing. I then marshalled the caravan, myself, and went behind.

'All this was not accomplished without words; and, eventually, being very angry, I threatened Abdul with a thrashing: an argument that at once silenced his voluble excuses. I did not choose to argue with him, but gave my orders.

'The men—who were out of it, of course—looked very sulky: but they obeyed. The lesson had its effect. This afternoon, the caravan went along as it ought to go, in a string—the drivers collecting *hashish* for their camels, and behaving in an exemplary manner. We therefore made good progress; and, though I hate slave-driving, this little explosion will, I expect, clear the air for the future.

'Only Abdurrahman, the Abyssinian, raised his voice, as the chief camelman, in defence of his camels; and it was splendid to witness his fine wrath (directed against Abdul, of course) and manly carriage: but, like summer lightning, it soon passed. I quite understood his point of view, and liked him none the less for his attitude, which was reasonable and not, I believe, due to ulterior motives. Still, we have to travel, as

well as the camels. It is largely a question of arithmetic: if two days' travel equal one camel, *prix fixe*, what will be the cost of delay? An Arab's notion of arithmetic is, that twice two are five, if you can get it: life would be dull indeed if the product of four were insisted upon, though, forsooth, there is always the consolation of *bakhshish*.

'They are a very good set of men, willing and hard working: but, being human, they naturally take advantage of any weakness I may show. I have indulged them, so far, wishing to save myself and them—though, to my mind, they have worked hard enough; but we must get on now. Each day has seen some slight restriction added or discipline enforced, until, to-day, the chief fault of all has been corrected—I trust, finally.

'To-night all are cheerful again; and I fancy things will go better as we shake down to the work before us. In future, ten hours a-day travelling, unless the pace is two-and-a half miles an hour for not less than eight hours. And to do that I shall have to get up (Abdul's subtle suggestion) at 5.30, and camp at 5.30 or 6.0, according to our rate of travel. We *must* do twenty miles a-day, bar unavoidable delays.

'Arriving at Ain Uara at 10.30 this morning, we found the water-holes, one of which was choked with sand, the other giving no water. At the latter there was a pool of beer-coloured liquid, quite undrinkable.

The men worked a little higher up, under the sandstone rock, and scooped out some black mud mixed with sand: but got no sweet water.

'This was awkward, as we depended on getting water here: and now we must travel three days to



NO WATER AT AIN UARA

Gara before being able to renew our supply. What water there was, oozing out, was salt, and refused by the camels: but the men took some in the waterskins to use by the way. I wonder how they can swallow it, much less retain it. They keep the best water

(obtained at Moghara) for one good drink a-day, on coming into camp, and for me to wash in, as well as for my cooking I filter some of this daily, and it tastes sweet and good. But our supply of it is alarmingly reduced and quite inadequate for the march. All this comes of Abdul not following my initial instructions to have the barrels padlocked and under proper control, not to speak of the recklessness of too great freedom in drinking: but he tells me that the water-supply at Ain Uara was considered dependable, under normal conditions, and that our caravan has been the first this year to visit it from Cairo. Bunkum!

'In the morning, just before our little rumpus, we passed five camels in the *hashish*, but saw no men. They belong probably to a party of Waled Ali, whose camp we did not see.

'Our course is now more to the south, where we have had to turn the flank of a range of hills. Soft sandy desert—heavy walking—and no *hashish*. Coastal Plateau about twenty miles distant.

'Eleven hours on the road, including halt at Ain Uara. Camp in a patch of vegetation.

'*Monday, March* 28.—To-day we did about twenty-one miles, starting at 7.0 and camping at 5.30.

'It was very hot the whole time (114° Fahr. in the sun at three o'clock) but, luckily, tempered by wind. The urgent need of getting to Gara, to obtain water,

spurs the men on; and they have been exemplary in their conduct all day. I gave each of them a knife and a gaudy-coloured handkerchief, from my box of presents.

'The camels have had no water since we left Moghara, four days ago, and must wait another two or three days before they can get any. In this great heat they will feel it badly.

'The men have only salt water to drink on the march. They gulp it down greedily, though with a wry face and a shrug of the shoulders, as much as to say: "After all, it is water!"

'I therefore use as little sweet water as possible. This evening I had an "altogether" sponge with about twelve ounces.

'On arrival in camp, the men silently sat down, in a circle; and each man received his cupful of water, solemnly, as if partaking of a sacrament. The cook is a thirsty soul, and is always grumbling about his allowance. He tries to get more than his share, too. Yesterday he flopped down on the road, exclaiming:

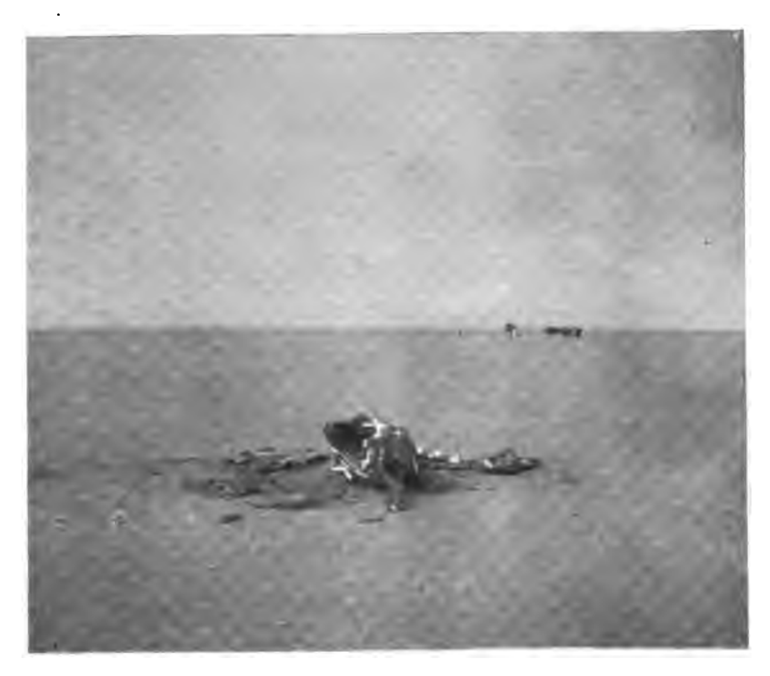
'"Here I sit until I get water! *Imshi!*"

'They gave him some salt water. It is painful to see the poor old man struggling to keep up, hanging on to the load of a camel. Twice to-day I gave him a ride on mine, and walked. The other camels must be spared: we ought to have had at least one more to fall back upon. The bad camel keeps us back; and we are in constant terror of its breaking down.

WATER—BITTER TO THE TASTE—BUT WATER.



'Here one realizes that one's life depends on one's camels. To-day we passed the skeletons of several; and a man's grave—just a mound of sand, with a few camel-bones on top to mark the spot—is within a few yards of my tent.



MEMENTO MORI

'*Tuesday*, *March* 29.—It has again been terribly hot. The mercury went up to 120° in the sun, at one o'clock, the highest figure on my register, and still showed buoyancy.

'The mischief is, that we have only half a barrel of water left, and the men are on half-rations. I cannot

decently take any for washing or cooking until we reach Gara, two days hence. If we get there, we shan't have a drop left.

'All along the route to-day we have been passing the skeletons of camels; and there were one or two men's graves: which shows that this is a bad part of the desert. We travelled from 7.10 in the morning to 5.40 this evening, with half-an-hour's halt at mid-day. I estimate the distance at twenty-one miles.

'No need to spur on the men now: they are more anxious than I am to get to Gara. It is a question of life and death: the camels being so many days without water, and exhausted. Every time they drop, there is a doubt whether they will rise again. *Ma' lèsh!* The great lesson of the desert is to learn to *do without.* I don't like it (though the feeling of conscious virtue is rather nice, for a change); but just at present I am chiefly concerned with the functions of my camera, the shutter of which is out of order and the roller refusing to work smoothly. I am chronicly thirsty, it is true; but I am also for ever anxious about my snapshots. After two evenings' work—warm work, the nights being hot now—I have got the tricky thing into order, however.

'When Abdul saw me poring over it, he asked me if I understood the mechanism. I told him I did not, never having used a camera before, but that I was taking it to pieces to try to find out.

'"It would be better to leave it alone," he remarked, appeasingly.

'"But what about my photographs?" I thundered, in a voice that sent him tumbling back to his tent.

'The duffer had never thought of that. Let well alone; let bad alone; let everything alone: and don't bother!

'*Wednesday, March* 30.—We have had a most exhausting day. Being now entirely without water, all have suffered. I have had no wash, except a dry smear, since yesterday morning. Happily, the desert is a good scavenger. Nor had I any dinner to-night, except what could be prepared without water: not much.

'That Arab bread (*kissera*), on which the men subsist entirely, looks like coarse brown-paper and tastes like shoe-leather—kid, it is true, but, still, shoe-leather. I went to see Abdurrahman make it, some evenings ago. With his great black paws he kneaded the flour into a stodgy mass; patted it encouragingly, until it was flattened out: when it was put over the men's camp-fire, on an iron dish, and turned repeatedly. The final process was to slip it under a canvas sack, to cool.

'Now, as I am condemned to eat *kissera*, having no other bread, it does not improve my appetite to see Abdurrahman hanging on to the tail of his camel for hours during the day: it gives the bread a distinct

flavour, or, at least, my heated imagination will have it so.

'As a great treat, the men occasionally mix *kissera* with butter and treacle (*mafruka*)—a sticky mess, which I tasted once, and hastened out of the tent. Yet, these chaps have nothing else to live on, except a trifle of cheese—long since eaten—and water. How they can walk and work on that diet beats me! But they do; and come up smiling each round of the clock, as strong as ever.

'We were, however, a solemn party to-day, all of us. No singing; no wrangling for water: 'no nothing,' as children say. Only a monotonous tramp, with death behind and water before us. Although the weather was hotter than ever, with *no wind*, we travelled from 6.50 A.M. to 6 P.M., and did about twenty-three miles.

'Last night the men had no supper (having failed to find brushwood to kindle their fire) and little or no water. When I blamed Abdul for not telling me of this at the time, he shrugged his shoulders: it was all in the day's work.

'At ten o'clock this morning we approached to within eight miles of the Coastal Plateau, which here trends south-west to Gara; and knew that we were within measurable distance of our goal. The desert became stonier and more undulating as we advanced. After the mid-day halt, we descended from the platform on

which we had been travelling into a wide tract of country covered with saline deposits.

'Thousands of acres of this dangerous desert lay before us. In appearance it resembled ploughed fields, or rough ice mixed with dirty snow. Furrowed and wrinkled, baked like pie-crust, its surface was most treacherous: indeed, a whole caravan might be swallowed up, in certain places, and leave no trace. But there was a safe passage across, though making a considerable *détour*; and this route was indicated by leading landmarks. It was a very narrow path, to stray from which was dangerous; and I was glad when we were safely landed on hard desert.

'Emerging from this inhospitable region, we passed two caravans, both of which had left Gara early this morning. These are the first we have met since leaving Cairo, fifteen days ago.

'The leading caravan was that of a Senussi Berber, who ignored our salutation, and, whipping up his camel, passed on the other side; but his companion, a trader known to Abdul, charitably gave the men, at their earnest entreaty, half a pail of water to drink.

'The other caravan was more interesting. It belonged to a notable (as Abdul judged him to be, from the jewelled sword at his side) of Wadai, who, with some members of his *harîm* in camel-litters, and numerous attendants, was going to Mecca, on the *haj*. He was mounted on a handsome white camel; and his

eager black face was almost entirely covered by his head-dress. His followers were splendid fellows—all well armed, and walking like gladiators. A most imposing picture they made as they filed silently past us.

'To the greeting of my men they returned a cold response: but the sheikh himself was more affable. He beckoned Abdul to his side, after he and I had exchanged the usual salutation in passing, and excitedly put to him a number of questions. I was the first European he had seen. He enquired who I was, and whither I was going. On being informed, he expressed surprise, and asked, with apparent concern:

'"What is he going to do at Siwa?"

'"Oh, look about," replied Abdul, vaguely; "like you will do at Mecca."

'We are now on the threshold of Senussi-land, and may expect some lively times.

'With less efficient men and worse camels, or a bad guide, we might have got into trouble. Abdul and Abd-el-Gade told me that, had we encountered another *khamsin* during the last few days, our camels would have been overcome and the expedition wrecked.

'*Thursday, March* 31.—The morning broke damp and cool, all my clothes being saturated with moisture. Later, however, it became very hot as we descended to the oasis of Gara. We started at 6.30, and approached close to the Plateau, arriving in camp at 1.45.

'Abu, who is exhausted by the long march, says that, when he gets to Siwa, he will stop there and become a Senussi. I told him that, among other restrictions, he would not then be permitted to smoke. Whereupon, he drew his forefinger slowly across his throat, and murmured plaintively: "Better that!"





APPROACHING GARA

'Presently we came to some small heaps of stones laid at regular intervals across the caravan-track. I asked Abd-el-Gade, what these signified? "Here," he replied, "all good Arabs sacrifice a sheep."

'We had no sheep: and I therefore proposed

sacrificing Abu, the cook. Whereat the guide, taking me half-seriously, replied:

'"We have meat enough."

'But when we came into camp I was asked to give the camelmen a fat sheep. It was then too late to procure one; and I told Abdul that the sacrifice must be postponed until we arrive at Siwa.'

Here endeth the Diary.



A LONG DRINK AT GARA.

CHAPTER IX

THE OASIS OF GARA

THE oasis of Gara covers a considerable area. Excepting the palm-trees, which dot the desert but do not grow in groves, it is wholly uncultivated. Lacking the luxuriance of Siwa, and with only a handful of indolent inhabitants, it is not a spot where one is tempted to stay; but to our eyes, blinded with the pitiless glare of the desert, it seemed a haven of rest. In truth, it is not more than from three to four miles in length, and from one to two miles across its widest part; whilst the vegetation is scanty, relatively speaking. Still, there are many fine clumps of low palms.

The village of Gara has about seventy-five inhabitants, some of whom are of the Senussi brotherhood. The villagers are miserably poor, subsisting on a scanty supply of dates and engaging in the manufacture of mats and baskets as their only industry. They possess donkeys; and the few men we met in the oasis were armed with long guns—Arab contrivances, resembling curtain-rods.

There are two wells in the oasis, one being close to

the village, near which we camped, and several water-holes.

I shall not easily forget our arrival at the first water-hole in the oasis. Here men and camels drank deep and contentedly. Here also Fluffy, the baby camel, enjoyed the first drink of water since its birth.

At Gara we met an Egyptian sergeant of police who, in company with two of the headmen, was transporting the taxes of Siwa, two years in arrear, to Damanhur, in Lower Egypt. The amount was said to be nearly £3,000. The sergeant was a capital fellow, who had seen service in the Egyptian army. The two sheikhs—one a Rharb, the other a Sherkh, representing the rival factions at Siwa—were on their way to Constantinople, on a mission that was easier to guess than to discover. Both avowed their adherence to the Senussi confraternity, and were, in consequence, interesting personalities to me.

These men, together with a few ragged-looking policemen, were encamped under a picturesque group of palms. Alas! they were stranded there, they and their precious charge, and were awaiting the advent of fresh camels from Siwa.

It appeared that, three days previously, their camel-men had deserted them on the night of their arrival at Gara, leaving the money but taking the transport-animals, which belonged to them. The reason assigned

was that, having murdered a man on the road to Damanhur, they feared to return by that route.

After our camp had been pitched, the sergeant, accompanied by the two sheikhs, paid me a visit. Coffee and cigarettes were served in my tent; but the



CAMP AT GARA

rigid Senussi declined these luxuries, though they partook of tea and biscuits. At the same time, I observed the Rharb taking snuff, contrary to regulations: but, as with the proverbial Scotsman in London, some slight relaxation was permissible, no doubt. I astonished them, and no doubt increased their suspicion

of me, by showing some familiarity with the ways of the Senussi and by the information I possessed regarding them and the politics of Siwa.

Needless to remark, we had a most interesting conversation, through the dense medium of Abdul's Arabic. Having satisfied them concerning the innocence of my object in journeying to Siwa, which naturally was their first concern, they told me that the situation there pointed to a favourable reception. They imparted much valuable information, particularly in regard to the recent fighting, by which 160 Siwans had lost their lives; and they confirmed, in every particular, Abd-el-Gade's report of a European, together with his entire caravan, having been massacred near Jarabub. They believed he was a Frenchman. The sergeant stated that he was taking back to Egypt some of Mr. Blunt's property, the loot of his camp on the occasion of the Siwan attack.

I beat about the bush some time before broaching the subject nearest to my heart; but no sooner did I mention the name of Jarabub, than I observed a change in the demeanour of the sheikhs and a subtle smile play over the good-natured features of the sergeant, as if he knew all about it. The Rharb, dark and scowling in his lighter mood, drew the folds of his *haïk* still closer over his mouth, and 'looked daggers'; the Sherkh, a far more amiable creature, with a frank manner and open countenance, became nervous and verbose.

The latter explained that it was not possible for a European to go to Jarabub.

'But why not?' I asked.

The sheikh shrugged his shoulders, and replied: 'They do not like Christians at Jarabub.'



THE SERGEANT'S CAMP

'But at Siwa they like Christians?'

'No.'

'Yet, you told me I should be well received there. Why not also at Jarabub?'

'Jarabub is different.'

'That is one reason why I want to go there. But,'

I added, feeling that my disclosure had been premature, and not wanting to close his mouth, 'it is possible I may find Siwa so interesting, that I shall not care to go further. It is a long way——'

'It is a long way, and the road is guarded: so that no European can pass.'

'Indeed! by whom?'

'By Senussi people.'

'From Jarabub?'

'No, from Siwa. Half-a-day's journey to the west is Siwan territory. You can go no further.'

I looked interrogatively at the humble representative of Egypt. The sergeant nodded his head:

'It is true,' he affirmed. 'They would certainly attack you, and turn you back.'

'But,' I exclaimed, 'the thing is preposterous! What harm can one do there?'

There was a dead silence.

Abdul broke in, with shining countenance: 'You see——'

'Oh, you go to the devil!'

I handed the sergeant a cigarette, to relieve the painful pause; and, as I did so, we exchanged amused glances.

He appeared to know more than he would say; and I determined to have some private conversation with him.

After turning the talk into easier channels, I dis-

missed my guests (they would have sat there for hours, otherwise) and had my bath.

Then, arrayed in *kaki* suit and Egyptian *tabush*, I strolled over to the sergeant's camp.

Here, in the cool of the evening, I was entertained



HIGHWAY ROBBERY

to tea—Siwa fashion, of which I shall speak anon. I took some trifling presents with me, and made myself agreeable. Our talk was light and unconstrained:

'No: I was not a general. I was merely an English tourist. What a lovely evening it was! I hoped all

the little Sherkhs and Rharbs were well,' &c., &c. We had quite a pleasant chat; and I consumed five cups of tea. Indeed, I had been drinking like a camel all the afternoon.

It was too late to go and see the village: I reserved that for my return visit. Taking my leave, I was solemnly escorted back to my tent by the sergeant and two men carrying lights.

I motioned the sergeant to step inside, and placed that before him which delighted his heart, though, strictly speaking, against his principles as a Mohammedan. Over the teacups (they happened to be teacups) we discussed the situation.

In brief, the sergeant amply confirmed what had been elicited on the subject. He had been a year in Siwa, and seemed to be well informed. There was nothing more to be said. The matter was closed.

He, however, gave us some useful information in regard to the route to Siwa. We were told to avoid one place, I forget which, where we might meet with obstruction; and I summoned the guide to join in our council: but Abd-el-Gade knew all about it. Then I turned them all out.

It was discouraging to have one's hopes chilled, on the outer threshold of Senussi-land; but, although I did not altogether discredit the evidence, I trusted it had been distorted, in order to look as ugly as possible.

I was awakened at five in the morning by the chant

of the *muëzzin* calling the Faithful to prayer. From the highest tower in the village his voice rang out clear and musical, and was sustained most artistically.

After bidding farewell to the sergeant and the two headmen of Siwa, we broke camp and left at seven o'clock.

We had seen very few of the Berber indigenes. Some loiterers and boys on donkeys, carrying rushes, had passed our camp ; and the headman of Gara came in to give greeting. Also, a curious nondescript creature was captured by Abdul and brought to me for photographic purposes. But as we now moved past this curious fortress-village, the walls were lined with a gaping crowd.

Further on, we met our willing captive of the previous day. He was carrying a jar of palm-wine (*lakbi*), which my men promptly annexed, in exchange for a 'small piastre.' It was our first and last act of highway robbery.

CHAPTER X

SOME REMARKS ON THE CAMEL

THIS narrative would be incomplete without some remarks on the camel. Having lived with him in close, too close, association for six weeks, I learnt to look upon the camel as the companion of man. Not that the camel is in any sense companionable—like your horse or your dog: on the contrary, he is a beast, in every sense of the word: but I refer to the camel in his social aspects—rather, we should say, as the help-mate of man.

I feel very strongly on the subject; and, having the reader at my mercy, like the parson in the pulpit, cannot resist imparting my views. If these are in the nature of strictures—one must draw the line somewhere —it is not because I am ungrateful to the useful and ugly brutes that served me so well; it is because I find lacking in the camel that sense of proportion, of moral fitness, of morality itself, without which no beast, however useful, however handsome, can claim our indulgence. Horses and dogs, in their time-honoured

relationship with man, have acquired certain noble traits of character that the species do not possess in a wilder and more primitive state; but the camel enshrines the traditions of Noah's Ark, where, as we know, the company was extremely mixed.

The camel is, in fact, an antediluvian monster. He does not walk like other quadrupeds. On the contrary, he moves his near-legs and off-legs in unison. This he does simply to annoy you. to make it uncomfortable for you to ride him—e'en though yours be the hand to tend him, in sickness and in health. Such blank ingratitude is reprehensible in the extreme. No doubt the camel is capable of natural affection; but he is not often guilty of it.

The gait of the camel is so peculiar, that I cannot pass it over in silence. He walks like a man who, with a pair of list slippers on his feet, slowly paces up and down the confined space of his bedroom, buried in thought, and with hands thrust deep into his side-pockets. It is a slatternly, slovenly, shambling gait. To all appearance, the hind-legs kick forward the fore-legs, out of sheer ill-temper. One would think the camel were on the brink of bankruptcy.

To be more precise, this is how the camel-pads mark the desert, commencing with that of the left fore-foot—the left-fore and the right-hind feet, and the

right-fore and the left-hind feet, touching the ground simultaneously:

4 ● R. hind-foot
2 ● R. fore-foot
3 ● L. hind-foot
1 ● L. fore-foot

This series of foot-marks covers about six feet of ground: there is, therefore, about one-and-a-half feet between each impress and each series, with about seventy-two strides to the minute, or thirty-six repetitions of the series of four-footsteps. It used to amuse me to work out these distances, and to compare them with my route-map. The rate indicated was two-and-a-half miles an hour.

The thud with which a heavily-laden camel drops to its knees is painful to hear. But you need waste no sympathy on him: he looks well after himself: wherever his body or legs come in contact with the ground he has a comfortable cushion, or pad, to rest upon. He collapses like a portable music-stand.

When you mount your *hagîn*, you are chucked forward and pitched back into your seat as you rise; the same process taking place in dismounting. You cannot be too careful. Occasionally, too, this malicious beast rises or falls suddenly, in the hope of upsetting your balance: so vindictive is he.

On being loaded, the camel keeps up one constant groan of complaint—not necessarily because the load is heavy, but systematically and on principle, like the

Home-rulers at St. Stephen's. Very often I have observed them moaning in an absent-minded sort of fashion, when they know full well that nothing is being done to them except to ease their pack. But they complain about everything: even if you attempt to



THE CAMEL'S MORNING TOILET

take a cigarette out of your saddle-bag. They trade on that proverb about the 'last straw.'

My camel—who rejoiced in the name of Zarlûn, though I called him Grumps—was made that way. He would look round at me viciously, baring his fangs; and would have liked to bite—*i.e.* pinch—me, had he

dared. The water-camel did once make a peck at me, when one evening I strolled over simply to see the camels feeding: but though he bruised me, and narrowly missed smashing my watch to atoms (his evident intention), he did not really hurt me.

The sound of their groaning is of a very varied and aggravating character. Sometimes it resembles the grunt of a pig, sometimes the roar of a lion; and occasionally the noise is exactly that of the dregs of a bath passing through the escape-pipe. You know what that is, when you are late for breakfast, and don't want anybody to know you are just getting up.

It was amusing to see my camel approaching a bush of *hashish*, with the stealthy tread of the villain in melodrama. He went straight for that; but when on the road, doing his duty, he serpentined about as much as he dared. So weak-minded was he on this subject, that he may be said to have suffered from *hashish* dementia. If, on the other hand, he had to pass *hashish*, he sidled by, with one eye on it, like a lady strolling down Regent Street.

In short, the camel is a nasty, growling, grumpy beast. His habits are antediluvian; his manners are the same. He is a contemplative, ruminative, speculative quadruped, more fitted for the desert than for the polite society of the animal world. You may respect him for his virtues, as the help-mate of man, and all that sort of thing; but you cannot love him for his



THE PLAINT OF THE CAMEL.

faults. I admit he is intelligent; but he is not an animal for which any affection can be felt. On the contrary, he is a self-satisfied drudge, and as self-contained as a London flat.

He goes about with the sneer of a superior person—



JUST A SNACK!

a stereotyped expression due, no doubt, to his heavy drooping upper-lip and flattened nostrils. He is never in a hurry—being far too aristocratic—and is most deliberate in all his actions. On the march he looks about him, either regarding the scenery—as if the desert belonged to him—or hunting for *hashish*. And

when he turns round, as he sometimes does, to gaze at you, on his back, he coolly observes you with that deliberate, appraising, and offensive stare affected by ladies who use a *lorgnette*. But, on the march, he will go for hours and hours at the same plodding pace, until he drops from exhaustion: the prototype of dogged perseverance, as distinguished from genius.

The camel is well-named 'the ship of the desert,' to the colour of which his worn-out, second-hand looking, hide closely approximates. As week succeeds week, and one's course, carefully steered from port to port, lengthens out, one feels really to be traversing trackless wastes—though camel-tracks are distinctly visible on the stone-strewn desert. With his long neck pointing forward, resembling the figure-head of a ship, the swaying action, to which one has to accommodate oneself, like a 'nodding mandarin,' readily recalls the motion at sea: it is said even to cause *mal de mer*, but that I did not experience, being a 'good sailor.' In a strong breeze, with the wind whistling past, and the camel occasionally shaking himself, the analogy is still closer. Moreover, one carries everything necessary for the support of life on board one's transport: and if the camel succumbs to the stress of travel or founders in the soft sand, one is shipwrecked indeed.

Only the camel among beasts of burden is fitted to travel in the desert. This is his natural habitat: and, in consequence, he is provided with every attribute to

fulfil his destiny and with many aids to ensure his survival.

It was most interesting to watch the development of Fluffy, the baby camel. From the first day she fell in behind her mother, caravan-style. She exactly imitated the action and evinced the characteristics of her grown-up companions, only that with each stride her well-poised head nodded pertly and daintily, and for hours at a stretch she would occupy herself in the vain but persistent attempt to secure natural nourishment. Sometimes, too, she would gambol about, like a lamb, in mere frolicsomeness, pull the tail of a camel or dart under its belly. Occasionally, she would trot up to the men and put her soft muzzle into their faces. In fact, she had the most winning ways, and was the pet of the caravan. Less commendable were her nocturnal habits, especially that of sniffing round my tent or patrolling the camp like a policeman. She was, of course, most inquisitive and mischievous: nothing was sacred to her, not even the inside of my canvas castle.

We were all very pleased that Fluffy survived the journey, though none expected it, and many times I thought she would succumb. Being worth only about four dollars, her value was not considerable: and she could not be expected to bear a load for fully four years. I once gave her a cigarette-box to carry, for the honour of the thing; and, on our return to Cairo,

I decorated her with the fastening of my *kuffir* made into a necklace, of which she seemed very proud.

I regret not being able to give the camel a better character. They and the cook were the only members of our party to whom I refused to give a testimonial. But Fluffy partly redeemed all camelkind in my eyes: and Abu had his *bakhshish* to console him.



ENTRANCE TO THE TOWN OF SIWA.

CHAPTER XI

ARRIVAL AT SIWA

Leaving Gara and passing through the oasis, in which the men were inclined to loiter, we ascended the *hammáda* and reached the Plateau, bearing more and more to the west as we advanced. On this elevated region, which was 'as level as a billiard-board,' covered with gravel, and sounding hollow to the tread in many places, we camped for the night, at an altitude above the oasis of about 550 ft.

Being now on the threshold of Senussi-land, we travelled more circumspectly. That evening the men set to work and cleaned their guns; whilst the camp was formed into a *zariba*, as a matter of simple precaution. We were having beautiful moonlight nights, and warm.

Next day, Saturday, April 2, we started early and, shortly after noon, reached the other end of the tongue of tableland, passing several skeletons of camels. Descending into a wide gully, which had all the appearance of a dried-up lake, we emerged at the further side, on the margin of the oasis of Siwa, camping, at sundown,

among the first patches of vegetation. We were now within a day's journey of our goal.

It had been a most exhausting march; and we were thankful to get into camp. A *khamsin* had been fighting us all day; and we had to face both wind and sun in the afternoon, during which the scorching heat was almost unbearable. Had we encountered this storm just before reaching Gara, our fate might have been different. I find a very brief entry in my diary that night, a considerable portion of which was spent in making preparations for my arrival at Siwa: sorting baggage, arranging presents, &c.

Rising at 5.30, we started at 7.0 o'clock. The *khamsin* was still blowing hard; and it prevailed, getting hotter and hotter, all day. It was like battling against the blast of a furnace.

So fierce was the wind, so overwhelming the sand-storm, that it was impossible to get luncheon, although we made an attempt under the shelter of some high rocks. To uncover the mouth was to swallow sand.

The camels were bleeding at the nostrils; and we all were muffled up to within an inch of our lives. It was hard travelling.[1]

We crossed miles of desert impregnated with salt,

[1] Mr. Talbot Kelly's spirited and artistic *Frontispiece* reproduces this scene, from photographs and descriptions supplied by myself, with a fidelity as to detail which is the result of many years' wandering in the desert and of his own familiarity with such episodes. The faithful Saïd is leading my camel.

passing a few pools of brackish water and occasional vegetation, such as the clump in which we had spent the night; but we did not strike the oasis proper, according to my notion, until we were close on Siwa. There we arrived, after a tramp of eleven hours, worn out, baked, and powdered with sand.

I shall never forget the impression, as we emerged from the sandstorm and entered the sylvan glades of the oasis. The *khamsin* abating, and the sun sinking in his evening splendour, undimmed by the whirlwind of dust, it was like entering the gates of Paradise. Here for the first time we were bathed in real shade. Here we slaked our raging thirst at a pool of fresh water embowered in Tropical vegetation. And here we smartened ourselves up for our reception at Siwa.

The upstanding barley-crops looked vividly, violently, impossibly green. White-robed Berbers, with red Tunisian caps on their heads, peered at us from the fields; but none returned our greeting. Men, some with guns slung on their back, passed us unheeding; only an old crony, black and withered, held out the hand of friendship and carried it to his lips and heart. Boys went by on donkeys, and gaped at us. But the luxuriant vegetation, the glorious groves of palms, seemed a sufficient welcome to this happy oasis.

Silently we filed by, taking no further heed of the churls we passed, and approached the town of Siwa.

We halted in front of the Mamur's house, which also is a police station. Here we were met by the sergeant on duty—the Mamur being absent—who brought me a chair and a *gouleh* of cold water, on the surface of which a rose floated.



CAMP AT SIWA

Our tents were pitched, and the camels driven off to drink at the nearest pool.

Shortly afterwards I received the Mamur, who was accompanied by the officer commanding the police and the youthful secretary of the *mamurîa*. We exchanged compliments, the Mamur expressing astonishment at our

travelling in such weather; and we had tea and cigarettes together.

In the evening, I was visited in my tent by the Egyptian doctor, or 'inspector of sanitation,' and the Kadi, who was most amiable. The Mamur also called again to inform me that three men of the police force, with their rifles, were to mount guard over the camp, and had brought a tent with them.

That night the town of Siwa was in a state of great excitement. Crowds lined the walls, and gathered into groups at the entrance. Drums were beating, to indicate that no one was allowed to leave or to enter the town until sunrise. Far into the night there floated to my camp, whenever I woke to consciousness, the rhythmic beat of drums and the distant murmur of many voices. And every now and then, the strident cry of the Egyptian sentries: *Wahéd! Wahéd!*—the meaning of which is,

'There is no God but God.'

It is both a greeting and a challenge.

CHAPTER XII

THE SENUSSI

BEFORE continuing my narrative, it will be necessary to engage the attention of the reader on a cognate subject, which, though new to all but a few serious students of Africa, is in itself of the highest importance and significance. I refer to the Senussi.[1]

Upon this subject so little has been written, of an exhaustive and authoritative character, that, with the exception of incidental references in books of travel and of two valuable memoirs, it may be said to be enshrined within the vernacular literature, to which Sidi Mohammed es-Senussi, the founder of the sect, was the chief contributor. The memoirs of MM. H. Duveyrier and Louis Rinn, both Frenchmen, are consequently of exceptional value. My information in regard to the Senussi is drawn largely from their laborious re-

[1] To be quite correct and pedantic, the plural form of Senussi should be written Senussîa; Siwans should be called Siwaia, &c., &c. But throughout this book I have preferred, in such instances, to keep to popular spellings. As regards transliteration from the Arabic, a process in which no two authorities agree, I have written words and names as I heard them, phonetically, and in accordance with the rules accepted by geographers, apart from the occasional use, for convenience sake, of the diæresis and the circumflex.

searches. That which I myself acquired at Siwa, and from conversations with my guide, who spent ten days at Jarabub, was relatively insignificant, being confined to recent developments, chiefly at the latter place.

Needless to add, the information is of a most imperfect character. Even on wide issues, the views of MM. Duveyrier and Rinn do not coincide: the former, for instance, ascribing sinister motives to actions which the latter regards as benevolent. Indeed M. Rinn gives the Senussi a fairly good character. In matters of detail, too, one observes similar discrepancies. Thus, according to M. Duveyrier, Jarabub was founded in 1861: but M. Rinn states that it was built in 1855, and that the elder Senussi died and was buried there in 1859.

Again, Rohlfs and his predecessors speak of the so-called Lifaya being the chief supporters of the Senussi cause at Siwa; whereas I found the name quite unknown there and the position changed: the Sherkyin, as this party is now called, being numerically weaker and exercising far less influence than the Rharbyin, all of whom are Senussi.

I mention these contradictions and points of divergence, not to refute or to reconcile them, but to illustrate the general uncertainty that exists in regard to matters even of essential importance concerning the Senussi confraternity. My purpose will be served if I

convey to the reader a fairly accurate conception of the subject.

The founder of the sect was Sidi Mohammed ben Ali es-Senussi, a lawyer, born near Mostaganem, in Algeria. Though in humble circumstances and practice, he was a learned and gifted man. In the closing years of the Turkish rule, he made himself so obnoxious to the authorities, owing to his seditious views, and the freedom with which he expressed these, that he was banished—some say, he went as a voluntary exile—to Marocco, where he resided for seven years, chiefly at Fez. Here he studied the Shadli doctrine, and joined the powerful Muleï Taieb Order, of which the Sherif of Wazan is chief.

Returning to Algeria, about the time of the French conquest, he traversed the mountain district, in the character of a professor of law and theology, and spread his precious doctrine. Moving eastwards, he entered Egypt, and made himself so objectionable to the authorities as well as to the Mohammedan conservative teachers at El Azhar, that he was forced to 'move on': it was even said that Sheikh Hanich, who pronounced an anathema against him, tried also to poison him.

So, shaking the dust of Egypt from his feet, but never forgetting his bad reception there, he continued his journey to Mecca, where the highest of the Shadli teachers, Ahmed ben Idris, then lived. With him he

ingratiated himself so well, that, on his death, he was appointed to succeed him.

Extending his sphere of operations, he preached, though with little success to his propaganda, in Yemen. His contact with the Wahábis, or Wahábites—who, together with himself, represented the most subversive elements in Islam—grafted on his teaching a still greater revolutionary spirit. 'The way of Mohammed' (*tarika Mohammedîa*) soon became 'the way of Senussi' (*tarika es-Senussîa*), as is the way of people who talk to convince themselves. And then he returned to Africa, establishing himself near Benghazi, which ever since has been one of the most important Senussi centres.

About 1855, let us say, he left Jebel el-Akhdar, where he was far too accessible to the Turks and to the Ulema of Constantinople, and went to Jarabub, obtaining from the Sultan a *firman* which made him practically master of the situation there.

It is a notable fact that, during his absence in the East, his influence must have increased: since, on returning to Egypt, though he refused to visit Cairo, the Viceroy himself came to his camp near the Pyramids; and there is no doubt that both he and the Sultan made concessions to this dangerous propagandist.

Sidi Mohammed es-Senussi was a tall man, of imposing appearance, eloquent, stern, and possessing those qualities that dominate the masses without gaining

their personal sympathy. True to his instincts, as well as to his religious principles, he rarely showed himself to his disciples, thereby maintaining a reputation for sanctity and a system of secrecy that characterized both himself and his doctrine. Absolutism and occultness are the two most potent powers in Senussi-ism. Abolish its hanky-panky, and there is but little left to conjure with.

Withal, Sidi Mohammed was a great and good man. The evidence is entirely in favour of his sincerity, of his earnestness, and of his piety. What he taught, he practised. He was an ascetic, a mystic (some say, a worker of miracles), and an author of no mean repute. In one of his works, published under the pretentious title of 'The rising Suns,' he embodies the principles of his doctrine. To the last day of his life, his policy was wholly pacific. A very different man, this, from the noisy impostor of Dongola! Light travels further and faster than sound.

Of the two great branches of the Moslem faith, the Sunnis and the Shiahs, the former are found in Turkey and in North Africa, the latter chiefly in Persia: hence a divergence of view regarding succession to the Khalifate.[1] The Senussi Mahdi recognises the Sultan of Turkey, provided he respects Senussi principles and politics; whilst Mohammed Ahmed, the Dongola boat-

[1] The Shiahs, or Shiites, reject the three first Khalifs as usurpers; the Sunnis, or Sonnites, regard these as rightful Imams.

builder and false Mahdi, appeared to patronise the Shiahs, by adopting the Persian name of *dervish* for his followers, though he himself was affiliated to the Order of Sidi Abd el-Kadr el-Ghilani, which is a development of the philosophy of the Shadlîa.

The latter appeared in the Nile Valley about the time when the Senussi Mahdi was expected to declare himself, thereby postponing an event which, though frequently prophesied and tacitly accepted, has not yet been realized. The Dervish Mahdi endeavoured to secure the adherence of his rival by appointing him one of his Khalifas. But Sidi Senussi ignored this implied authority, as an insult to his own pretensions, and steadfastly refused, though repeatedly urged, to join forces. This was not out of any consideration for Egypt, of course. When, later, the Dervishes were attacked in Darfur by Abu Gemaizeh, who led an army from Wadai against them, styling himself or his followers Senussi, the Sheikh of Jarabub, it is true, disclaimed all responsibility and all connection. But perhaps this was due to the fact that Abu Gemaizeh was defeated: since it is difficult to believe, in view of their close relationship, that Wadai should have broken out into open hostility without the concurrence of their spiritual chief. The Dervish movement having now been broken up, and the Senussi having supplanted it in Darfur, it remains to be seen what will be the inter-

action of these rival forces: the one dead, though not buried, the other daily increasing in power.

Both the Sunnis and the Shiahs look for a Redeemer, or Mahdi: the former expect a new prophet, the latter the re-appearance of one of the Imams. Though differing on many points, they agree in general on the signs and marks that shall herald and distinguish him.

When, in or about 1859, Sidi Mohammed ben Ali es-Senussi died at Jarabub, he was buried in a magnificent mausoleum which now lies in the great mosque there, and is the object of pious pilgrimage, superseding the *haj* to Mecca, among all his followers and even for other Mussulman devotees. On his death-bed he appointed his son—then a lad of about thirteen or fourteen years of age, and now, therefore, about fifty-three—to be his successor; and, it is said, he plainly declared him to be the coming Mahdi.

Senussi el-Mahdi, as the present Grand Master of the Order is styled by his adherents, though he himself does not yet claim the title, is undoubtedly a lineal descendant of the Prophet, through Fatma; and, besides fulfilling other conditions, he is said to have between his shoulders 'the sign of the prophets'—a blue mark or nævus. According to the Moslem tradition, the bodies of Moses, Christ, and Mohammed, 'the most perfect of creatures,' were similarly distinguished.

The Senussi claim that they are neither reformers nor innovators: they wish to expunge all idea of revolution from their doctrine. They profess to preach the 'primitive contract,' or original teaching, of the Korán, free from all heresies and innovations, but developed by the various mystic Orders of the Orthodox rites. They, therefore, revert to the Korán as first expounded, and recognise the authority of the Sonna,[1] affirming the necessity of the Imamat (pan-Islamic theocracy) and the excellence of a contemplative and devout life. But in practice, as in theory, their doctrine inclines to accommodate itself to circumstances. Now it is, what we would call, Lutheran; now Puritan; and, again, particularly in its political aspects, wholly Jesuitical.

Its most vital characteristic is, however, its capacity for assimilation. Thus, the Senussi claim the support of no less than forty (or, as some authorities would say, sixty-four) groups—religious Orders, or branches of these—more or less allied to the Shadli school of philosophy, which embraces the majority of the Moslem Orders. Amalgamation is undoubtedly aimed at, and is, in fact, progressing rapidly: because wherever the Senussi settle, there they eventually rule. Its latitudinarianism thus constitutes the greatest cohesive force in the propaganda of the Senussi.

[1] The Sonna is a kind of supplement to the Korán, or collection of traditional sayings of the Prophet.

A man may become a Senussi without abandoning his Order: but it is necessary for him to give up 'revolutionary ideas,' dancing, conjuring, and all vanities. He must submit to certain restrictions: intemperance ranking as a cardinal sin, not only is he debarred alcohol in every form, but he may not drink even coffee, or take snuff, or smoke. In principle, the neophyte is supposed to 'renounce the world'; and in practice he is certainly compelled to submit himself to his spiritual directors. Blind obedience is rigidly exacted from all adherents, whatever their rank.

The person of the Grand Master is so sacred, that usually he is veiled; and it is the greatest honour to be accorded a personal interview. The Sheikh el-Senussi governs through his viziers, who reside at his court. Mokaddem, or apostolic prefects, administer ecclesiastical districts; and so great is their power, that they in their turn reflect the majesty of their master. Under the latter are the wekils, who take charge of business matters, and are, consequently, permitted to have dealings with Christians.

Khuan (Brothers) are enjoined to attend conferences and make pilgrimages to the convents, particularly to Jarabub. They have to pay annually into the Grand Treasury two-and-a-half per cent. of their capital, if this exceed four guineas, the amount of exemption. Other contributions are made in kind. The poorer classes give their services, either as labourers in the

oases, or as spies, messengers, poisoners, and assassins. All animals belonging to the confraternity are branded with its *cachet*, the name of Allah (الله).

The 'way of the Senussi' embodies a triple protest: (1) against concessions made to Western civilization; (2) against innovations, the result of what we call progress, in Eastern countries; and (3) against all fresh attempts made to extend Western or European influence —not exempting Turkish—in countries still preserved by 'the divine grace.' The Senussi regard it as a meritorious act to kill a dog of a Christian, wherever he may be found; whilst all good Moslems are enjoined to expatriate themselves from countries under Christian domination.

This doctrine of emigration—or, to be more precise in this case, migration to the oases of the Sahara under Senussi rule—is an old one. It has been preached in the mosques for centuries past. It was advocated by an Imam rejoicing in the name of Mahi-ed-Din-Abu-Zakaria-Yahia-ben-Sharef-ech-Shafaï, who died in 1278. This personage, whose name is long enough to identify him, announced that 'Emigration is obligatory on all Mohammedans when their territory falls into the hands of Infidels.'

One need not dwell on the effect of this policy, in attracting a population to the Sahara. It is sufficient to remark, that new routes are being opened up throughout the length and breadth of this vast domain

of desert, and oases are being created along these highways of commerce and of Senussi influence. It is even stated that, now-a-days, not only a Senussi, but any Mussulman, may travel from Wadai, across the Sahara, to Benghazi, without scrip or purse, camel or dromedary. There are oases along the entire route, at a distance of one-day's journey apart, where Moslem travellers are entertained (for three days at a time) and helped on their way.

These oases are cultivated by immigrants—chiefly slaves, who have received their freedom and have been educated in the tenets of the Senussi faith. They and their wives are said to lead a blissful existence. At least, it may be admitted that, in this respect, the Senussi are performing benevolent work: the tendency of their policy being to break up the nomadic life and to check the ravages of marauders.

Women are utilised as propagandists and agents, sometimes also as seductive courtesans. Being more intelligent than the males, among Berbers, women are educated to share in the great work, and are permitted to wear ornaments. It was to their machinations that the subjection of the Tibu was chiefly due.

And, as for slaves, it may be remembered how Sheikh Senussi turned them to account in the pacific conquest of Wadai. A caravan of slaves having been despatched from that country, across the Sahara, was intercepted and captured on the frontiers of Tripoli

and Egypt by a band of nomads. Senussi, however, purchased the lot; gave them their freedom; and educated them at Jarabub. They were then returned as missionaries to their homes: the result of which was to enlist the sympathy and adherence of Wadai. And when, in 1876, the throne of Wadai became vacant, Senussi's nominee was elected Sultan. Wadai, with its three million inhabitants, has ever since remained faithful to the cause, frequently despatching rich caravans to fill the Treasury and droves of slaves to work on the plantations. What becomes of the residue of slaves is not precisely known: but the Senussi are reputed to be slave-traders.

The initiation of converts is a simple ceremony. Illiterate Arabs repeat the 'little rose,' or *tarik*, on being admitted as Brethren:—'God pardon me' (100 times). 'There is no God but God, and Mohammed is His Prophet: every glance and every breath is known to Him' (300 times). 'Oh, God! pour Thy blessings on our Prophet Mohammed, him who could neither read nor write, and bless us his followers and friends' (100 times).

More elaborate are the devotions of the Khuan, whose *diki* and manner of praying differ from those of other Orders. They pray with their arms crossed on the breast, the left wrist being taken between the thumb and index-finger of the right-hand. They carry their rosaries in their hand and not suspended round their

necks. But in other external respects they seek to escape detection, when in the presence of strangers.

Precautions are taken to hide their connection with the Brotherhood. They frequently claim to belong to other Orders: consequently, it is not easy to recognise a Senussi, if he choose to disguise the fact.

The *diki* of the Senussi, which are given by M. Rinn, are too lengthy to quote in this place. Simple in form, they are, of course, characterized by vain repetition.

And now, as regards the distribution and numbers of the Senussi, a subject into which M. Duveyrier enters with great minuteness. For reasons that have been stated or are otherwise obvious, it would not be possible to make an accurate estimate, especially at the present day. The tendency being towards secrecy, the exclusion of Europeans becoming more rigid as time passes and the fanaticism of the Senussi takes greater hold on their conquests, it is apparently impossible to gain even a rough approximation to the truth. Only the Mahdi's ministers know the number of his followers, whose names are inscribed in registers.

M. Duveyrier estimates the 'actual subjects' of Senussi el-Mahdi to amount to no more than three million. The Senussi themselves, the rank and file, speak irresponsibly of eight or nine million. The truth lies probably between these two estimates—a sufficiently

wide choice—since Wadai alone has nearly three million inhabitants, all of whom are claimed as adherents to the confraternity.

Zawia, or convents, of the Senussi are found throughout the length and breadth of North Africa, in Somaliland, Arabia, and in Mesopotamia. Writing in 1883, M. Duveyrier estimated their number at not less than 120; and many more must have been founded since that date.

The most active centre is in the peninsula of Barka, nominally under Ottoman rule, where the Senussi administer their own code of justice, cheek by jowl with the Turkish officials. If a Bedwi of those parts swear: 'May I be excluded from the *zawia* if . . . .' &c.: one may be sure he is speaking the truth. And this oath has superseded that on 'the head of the Prophet' among the Senussi. The ruins of Cyrenaica belong to the Brotherhood, and would-be explorers are now warned off. At two oases—Aziat and Nejîla—the position of which is not precisely known, and probably at other places in the peninsula, they keep hundreds of fleet camels, ready equipped, with a corresponding number of Negro drivers, which can be despatched at a moment's notice to any part of Africa. At Tobruk—a port which Schweinfurth visited in 1883, and described as possessing the finest harbour in North Africa, except Bizerta, being nearly as large and as deep as, and more secure than, that of Alexandria—they

import, unhindered, arms and munitions of war, which are landed by ships specially engaged in this contraband traffic. At Benghazi, too, they have a free hand. In short, the Senussi possess in this, the most fertile and valuable, district of Tripoli a *pied-à-terre* of vital importance, from which the feeble administration of the Porte dare not oust them. Any European Power taking possession of Tripoli would therefore come into conflict with the Senussi.

Other important centres are located at Aujila, where the Mojabra slave-traders of Jalo are their willing supporters; at Kufra, their present metropolis; in Fezzan, Tibesti, Borku, Ennedi, Darfur and Wadai.

Minor centres are found in Marocco, with the reigning dynasty of which country Senussi el-Mahdi is connected by birth through Idris, the founder; in Algeria, which is honeycombed with Senussi intriguers; in Tunis, where they maintain a precarious foothold; throughout Tripoli; and in all the oases to the south of these regions, up to Tuat and Ghat. They are also found along the Mediterranean Littoral, between Barka and Egypt, and southwards to Jarabub and Siwa; finally, in the highlands of the Sahara, in many parts of the Central Sudan States, in Senegambia and in Somaliland.

In Egypt there are, or were in 1883, seventeen convents, up to 18° N. latitude; but, though successive Khedives have shown them favour, the Senussi have

never had any hold on the Nile Valley. The *zawia* at Siwa was founded as far back as 1843.

Constantinople is the only place on the borderland of Europe where they maintain a footing; and here they have been shown signal, though fluctuating, favours. In Asia, Mecca has a *zawia*, with a library of 8,000 volumes; and, it is said, there are eleven more *zawias* in Arabia. In the Hejaz and Yemen the Senussi certainly appear to be active; and between Mecca and Mesopotamia, their chief centres, they exist in scattered communities.

So vast a combination is necessarily fraught with danger to the peace of Africa; so intolerant and powerful a sect is, ostensibly, capable of shaking Islam to its foundations, when the moment of action arrives. Should the Mahdi declare himself, and preach the *Jehad*, or Holy War against Infidels, his forces would come into conflict with the French in Algeria, Tunis, Senegambia, &c., with the Turks in Tripoli, and with the British in Egypt.

He is fond of repeating an aphorism, of which he is not the author:

> 'Turks and Christians are in the same category:
> I will break them at one blow.'

When shall that blow be struck? Up to the present there has been no sign of hostilities on a large scale. In Algeria the Senussi have been at the bottom of many of the tribal risings, and of much of the political

unrest which constantly threatens the French position, particularly in the oases and on the borderland of the Sahara. The Senussi, too, according to M. Duveyrier, are responsible for the greater number of murders and massacres of European travellers and their caravans (the list he publishes of victims to Arab fanaticism in those parts is sufficiently formidable); and we know full well that their hostility and fierce exclusiveness are directed against all Europeans who venture into their midst. M. Duveyrier, himself, narrowly escaped assassination—a fact which perhaps accounts for the close attention he has given to the subject.

Rohlfs, another traveller subjected to their persecution,[1] remarks, in his work on *Kufra*: 'What specially characterizes them, above every other Mohammedan

[1] On his famous journey to Kufra (1879), Rohlfs, though armed with the *firman ali* of the Sultan, had to turn back from Aujila and Jalo—in Turkish territory—because the Mojabra refused to give him a guide without Senussi's consent. He was badly treated at these places; and in el-Areg, where he was stoned, he drew his revolver. He therefore returned to Benghazi, and made a fresh start. Arriving eventually at Kufra, he was held prisoner, under demands for money. A plot was made to murder him. On the very night that he and his European companions escaped by stealth, his camp was attacked and plundered: they themselves escaped massacre, owing to the intervention and protection of a friendly sheikh. A few days after, word came from the Senussi Mahdi, to treat the expedition well.

In his journey from Tripoli to Alexandria (1869), Rohlfs passed near Jarabub, and wanted to visit it. But, he adds, 'I deeply regretted that my guide, who himself belonged to the Order of the Senussi, refused to accompany me; and alone, I openly confess, I did not dare to penetrate into this wasp's-nest of Semitic intolerance' (page 82). He therefore camped at the *sebkha* Hoëssa. On reaching Siwa, he was told that he would have been well received at Jarabub. But, as at Kufra, this assurance came *after* the event; and was therefore quite untrustworthy.

Order or sect, is, not merely the fanaticism within their own religion, but their burning hatred of Christians, which in this respect drives them to every crime' (page 285). He considers them the most powerful sect in Islam: above the four Orthodox sects, and almost forming a fifth.

Such fanaticism and fierce intolerance may excite momentary surprise: but we have merely to recall certain dark periods in the history of the Christian churches, and the wonder ceases. To non-adherents and to those of other sects they exhibit a tolerance that, *mutatis mutandis*, may be compared with the relations subsisting between Protestant and Romanist, Greek and Armenian, Slav and Jew; but no anathema is strong enough against those of their co-religionists who submit to the political supremacy of Christian Powers, or even those who effect a compromise with European civilization and influence—*pace* Egypt. For Moslems are expressly enjoined to emigrate from such countries; and no Senussi, except wekils and other go-betweens specially exempted, is permitted to serve a Christian or a Jew, to address him, or to return his greeting: on the contrary, he is exhorted to kill him. Naught but political expediency arrests the hand of the assassin; and in the heart of the desert this safeguard does not exist: for the Senussi rule the Sahara, and no Power can touch them there.

It was to escape possible reprisals, to avoid all

contact with Turkey and the European Powers, that the Mahdi retreated to the distant oasis of Kufra, situated in the heart of the Libyan Desert. Five years ago, he and some three or four thousand of his people, among them being all the wealthy residents, left Jarabub and migrated to Kufra—'the land of the infidels,' as its Arabic name, ironically enough, implies.

This migration was foreseen by Rohlfs, who, in the work above quoted, remarks: 'The *Zawia* el-Istat in Kufra has even now (1879) as great a reputation for sanctity as Jarabub itself. Indeed, if perchance some day another rule should rise in Egypt, and Siwa, in which oasis Jarabub lies, fall into other hands, then the Senussi will certainly make the *zawia* of Kebabo the central place of their authority. It is already the richest *zawia*' (page 280).

So far as we know, Senussi el-Mahdi has not settled at el-Istat, but at Joffa, close by. Mr. Jennings Bramley, during one of his adventurous journeys in the desert, learnt that the Senussi had opened up new direct routes: from Kufra to Jarabub, from Kufra to Siwa, from Farafra to Siwa, and from Kufra to Khargeh, the Egyptian oasis. The latter step is ominous. But it is doubtful whether there is enough water on this route to supply more than one thousand men and camels daily: certainly there cannot be enough to support a concentration of, say, fifty

thousand men, without which an invasion of Egypt could not be safely attempted.

Kufra comprises a group of at least five oases, with sand-dunes intervening, and covers an extensive area of desert, in which vegetation exists almost everywhere. Taiserbo and Kebabo lie in extensive swamps; and there are many salt-lakes in the oases. In spite of inimical physical conditions, the Mahdi has, it is said, created here a *zawia* which rivals Jarabub.

From this inaccessible fortress he governs Senussi-land. Swift messengers carry his orders to all parts of North Africa; and he is kept constantly informed by his agents of all that transpires in the outer world, receiving books, pamphlets, newspapers, and all the requirements of his responsible office. His military and political organization is complete.

The policy of the Senussi never changes.

CHAPTER XIII

JARABUB

THE glory of Jarabub has departed in the train of the Mahdi; but its sanctity remains, as the Mecca of all good Senussi. Here, in the *zawia* or mosque, as has been mentioned, the body of Sidi Mohammed ben Ali es-Senussi, the founder of the Order, reposes in a rich mausoleum: and, in spite of one of the tenets of the sect—which prohibits the veneration of saints and prophets after their death, in order 'to exalt the idea of God'—this hallowed spot attracts, and will continue to attract, numerous devotees and pilgrims. No man may, however, enter or leave Jarabub without express permission; and all strangers are, on their arrival, 'put to the question.'

My information in regard to Jarabub was derived chiefly from my guide, Abd-el-Gade, a Bedwi of the tribe of Jaáme. Differing in some respects from that which hitherto has been accepted as accurate, I give it for what it is worth.

Four years ago, Abd-el-Gade left Cairo and proceeded to Jarabub, viâ Siwa, performing the journey, with one

camel, in twenty-four days. He remained there ten days. His object was to collect a debt due to him: and he seems to have been well treated, being allowed to pray in the mosque daily, without suffering exhortations to join the Brotherhood, and enjoying a certain degree of liberty.

At the time of his visit, the Mahdi had been absent from Jarabub for one year, his departure coïnciding more or less with the murder of the so-called European traveller who had attempted to reach the Senussi sanctuary. His report in regard to this matter, to which I have already alluded, was subsequently confirmed by the sheikhs of Siwa and others. At Jarabub he was told that the Mahdi, or some learned *fekké* (priest), read 'in the book' that a European was approaching; and that, in consequence, a body of horsemen was despatched against him, and destroyed him and his caravan. They put out his eyes and cut his throat.

On returning to Cairo, I made inquiries regarding this ill-fated traveller. The French authorities knew nothing about it; but Baron O——, who has made a special study of the Senussi Question and is admirably informed on the subject, stated that this man was no Frenchman, but an eccentric Egyptian bookseller, whom the Senussi at Jarabub took to be an English spy, and therefore killed. This conjecture has a certain amount of plausibility in its favour, and may be accepted as

the nearest approach we shall ever make to the truth of the matter.

The site of Jarabub was well chosen. Situated 150 miles to the south of Tobruk, the nearest Mediterranean port used by the Senussi, and 110 miles N.N.W. of Siwa, on the road to Benghazi (at least 300 miles distant), and to Jalo (about 240 miles away), it occupies a strategic position on the great caravan-route of North Africa. It is both sufficiently remote and conveniently accessible to safeguard and to serve the objects of its foundation. Walled-in on three sides by high mountains, about eight miles distant, Jarabub is built on a nucleus of rock, somewhat higher than the surrounding *hammáda*, on the southern slope and among the catacombs of the valley. It resembles all desert towns and villages in its character as a citadel; but differs from these by being built almost entirely of stone. It is much larger than Gara, which may be taken as its prototype, but smaller than Siwa.

A single road, and a very narrow one, leads past it, or through it, conducting to Siwa on the one hand and to Benghazi on the other. A caravan, approaching or passing Jarabub, dare not leave this road: because, on either side, are *bidma*—desert lands so impregnated with salt, that men and camels would be engulfed, should they stray from the direct path and attempt to traverse this treacherous ground.

There are two routes from Siwa to Jarabub, both

occupying three-and-a-half to four days' easy march, for laden camels. The northerly route runs parallel to the Coastal Plateau, at a distance of about two miles; the southerly route leads past Zeytun and Kamissa: the *hammáda* intervening. Along both these routes water



THE ROAD, ACROSS THE SEBKHA, TO JARABUB

may be found: on the former, at the close of each day's march; on the latter, at more irregular intervals.[1] On the northern, or Girbeh, route, there are three *hattieh* (Girbeh, Umasha, Girgab), where the water per-

[1] Namely, Zeytun and Umragi on the first day; Shiata early on the second; El Washka (salt-lake) at the end of the third day.

colates through the solid rock, that found at Girgab being salt. On the southern route are three wells (Zeytun village, Umragi *hattieh*, Shiata *hattieh*) where the water is good and sweet, that at Shiata being found in a rock-cistern. It is along this, the Zeytun, route that caravans travel, the other being practically deserted. The two routes unite in the Girgab *hattieh*, less than a day's journey from Jarabub, and, passing through the *biúma*,[1] or salt lands, cross a large salt-lake called El Washka. This *sebkha* is close to Jarabub, the road across it being similar to those I saw in the *sebkha* near Siwa town.

Jarabub is at once a fortress and a convent, a university and a shrine. Within its high walls, which are built of stone and are very strong, impregnable except to modern artillery, there are many stone buildings: a fine mosque, with a courtyard in front, surrounded by dwellings formerly occupied by the Mahdi and his councillors; a number of houses for students and their teachers; rooms for guests and the wekil in charge of them; and many rest-houses. There are two wells: one near the bath, the other in the spacious court, where all the inhabitants of the town and many animals can be collected together without overcrowding.

With regard to the shape of the town, my

[1] This is the local name by which the salt desert is known. In the Wadi Natrun, the salt desert is called *Kurshéf*. Both names appear to be of Berber origin.

information differs from that previously understood. Abd-el-Gade stated that it was in the form of a horse-shoe, or rather a stirrup, the rounded end facing the east; and that there were only two gates admitting to the town (he saw no others)—the eastern and the western. He described these gates as being very strong, built of stone and wood, and so wide that four camels can enter abreast.

Immediately outside the walls is sheer desert. The oases and gardens lie at a distance of half-an-hour's march; and there are many water-holes. The camels, horses, cows, goats, and sheep, of which the inhabitants possess a great number, are driven every evening to the *hattieh*, some being kept there, by Negro slaves. Girgab *hattieh* is also used for this purpose.

At the time of Abd-el-Gade's visit, there were scarcely more than two thousand people at Jarabub, of whom, he said, only five hundred were slaves. The majority was composed of boys, undergoing a course of instruction at the university; and he saw no women or girls. All the men were Arabs, well dressed, and apparently in affluent circumstances; and the town was clean and orderly.

It is evident, therefore, that, at the present day, Jarabub is little more than a university, though it may still serve as an arsenal and fortress. Doubt has been cast on the fact that there are cannon at Jarabub: but Abd-el-Gade stated, positively, that he saw these with

his own eyes. He did not count them, but, in answer to my question, said he believed there were as many as fifteen—the number of cannon said to have been purchased at Alexandria and transported thither.

Jarabub was founded in the desert at a spot, reputed to have been visited by Hercules, where the catacombs spoke of a former civilization and therefore presaged the existence of water. In 1874 it was still a small town, though wells had been sunk and plantations laid out. It was not until 1876, concurrently with the conversion of Wadai, that it assumed its present proportions. Many men from Wadai, apart from the slaves, came here, as also to other oases, as free labourers. In 1880, the Mahdi was credited with a bodyguard of 4,000 Algerians; and it is certain that, during the years of his residence there, the town had a population of fully six thousand souls.

These were the great days of Jarabub, when, every year, towards the end of *Ramadán*, a stately synod was held, to discuss spiritual and political affairs, and was attended by all the Mokaddem. The Mahdi's brother, Sidi Mohammed Sherif, then lived; and to him was entrusted the supervision of ecclesiastical affairs and religious instruction.

This learned man, whose reputation as a lawyer, theologian, and student of science was widespread in the Mohammedan world, died a few years ago, and now rests in the mosque by the side of his sainted father.

The wonderful library, which Mohammed Sherif had collected, was transported after his death to Kufra, requiring as many as 500 (some said, 800) camels for that purpose.

Both he and his brother, the Mahdi, married daughters of one of the wekils, who had charge of the household and domestic affairs ; another wekil—a vizier—with three tolbas under him, attended to the centralized administration of the *zawia*.

Nowadays, though constant communication is kept up with Siwa and the outer world, Jarabub is quieter. The principal man there is one, Hussein, from Trablis, in Algeria—said to be a nephew of the Mahdi, and therefore probably the son of his late brother.

The news of Sidi Mohammed Sherif's death was a great disappointment to me, because I had depended on his support, and had specially taken for him a *burnûs*, which I hoped he would have deigned to wear. Moreover, he would have had the power to receive me at Jarabub, without referring the matter to the Mahdi; and probably no other sheikh enjoyed the same authority. I had, therefore, another difficulty to face, in addition to those that made my task appear all but insuperable.

CHAPTER XIV

THE OASIS OF SIWA

THE oasis of Jupiter Ammon was in ancient days the nucleus of an inhabited region, in which vegetation occurred at isolated spots, extending from Gara in the east to the Tafaya well, far beyond Siwa, in the west.

Throughout this great depression, which is broken up by *hattieh* and *sebkha*, the escarpment of the Coastal Plateau and the conical hills in the valley are honey-combed with rock-tombs. Even in some of the *hattieh* mummies have been found. The original inhabitants may have been cave-dwellers; but, at the time when the Oracle spoke in words that made history, over two thousand years ago, the oasis must have supported a considerable population at a relatively high degree of civilization.

The oasis of Siwa is comparatively restricted. Its widest limits may be regarded as extending from Jebel Mulei Yus, the bold headland that greets one's arrival from the east, to Kamissa, west of Siwa town—a distance of about eighteen miles: and even within this area the desert predominates. The oasis, properly so



SIWANS CARRYING A PALM-TRUNK.



called, is not more than five or six miles in diameter. Its axis, or greatest length, lying N.E. and S.W., is at most six miles. Its width varies considerably, being a few hundred yards in places where desert and rich vegetation lie in close proximity, and in no part more than four or five miles. From the summit of Jebel Muta, the general effect is that of a luxuriant oasis surrounding the hill, with sheets of gleaming water seen through the trees.

On the borders of this verdant island, beyond the palm-groves and cultivated lands, one enters the *sebkha* region. Large lakes, which, when I visited them, were covered with salt and resembled a scene in winter, surround the oasis on three sides, the intervening desert—and, indeed, that throughout the oasis also—being impregnated with saline deposits. In the south, low dunes bound the horizon. In the north, the Coastal Plateau shows a bold line of escarpment, from 300 to 600 feet high, in a fine sweep of chalk cliffs extending from the west to the north-east. And in all directions conical hills rise from the desert, like sentinels in this sleepy hollow.

These isolated hills, fashioned like extinct fumaroles, are conspicuous landmarks. Jebel Amelal and Jebel Jari, in the west, are over 300 feet in altitude; the others are lower: but all are of the parent limestone rock of which the Coastal Plateau is composed. The town of Siwa and its adjacent necropolis are constructed

on two of these hills; Aghormi, the most ancient habitation in the oasis, occupies another; and Jebel Muta, 'the hill of the dead,' a fourth.

The limestone rocks are rich in fossil-wealth; in places, beyond Siwa, they assume fantastic shapes, resembling dead cities and crumbling monuments of antiquity. Hot springs, a sulphur mine (reported by Caillaud), and occasional earthquakes [1] indicate volcanic action. The soil is everywhere impregnated with salt, which seems to fuse with the sand, breaking under the feet like light scoria. All the paths in the oasis are, therefore, rather rough to traverse.

Aristotle, Eratosthenes, and Strabo recognised the fact that the oasis of Siwa was lower than Lower Egypt; but it was not until Caillaud visited it, that we obtained any definite knowledge of its depth below sea-level. Caillaud made it 108 feet; Rohlfs, 170 feet; and another observer (Jordan) no more than 82 feet: so that we are still in doubt as to the precise level of the oasis.[2] Nevertheless, it certainly lies considerably below that of the Mediterranean.

All the springs emanate from the Coastal Plateau. Sweet water comes to the surface in no less than 150

[1] It is stated that, in 1811, an earthquake threw down a portion of the temple of Umma Beyde; and that earth-tremors are felt occasionally. These have had the effect of re-opening wells that, through neglect, have become choked.

[2] All these were barometric observations, those of Rohlfs being the mean of as many as twenty-three. No one appears to have used a boiling-point thermometer.

places, where there are springs and water-holes. The wells are protected by masonry—blocks of limestone, most of which have been placed into position two thousand years ago, though the work might have been finished yesterday. Pools of fresh water and of salt water lie in contiguity: fresh-water springs bubble up even in the *sebkha*.

The water in these salt-lakes rises, irregularly, in the winter months; and then gradually subsides, leaving behind a thick deposit of the purest salt. Causeways lead across these treacherous lands, along which caravans may pass in safety. One of these causeways near Siwa having broken down, the whole town turned out to mend it. They have now built bridges under the road to ease the weight of water.

The presence of so much stagnant water and marshland near the inhabited parts of Siwa, the intermixture of the salt and fresh waters, the organic decay and great heat in the summer, breed fevers. The low-lying oasis, shut in on the north, and an exclusive diet of luscious dates, increase the predisposition to contract malaria. The stuffy, dark houses and thoroughfares in the town are, moreover, hot-beds of typhoid. Consequently, the rate of mortality, from disease alone, is a high one.

In the summer, from May to October, when *khamsins* prevail, all the inhabitants are down with malaria, lying about, incapable of work, as if the plague were

rampant. One of the Egyptian officials informed me that the natives had no cure for this scourge, except to lie all day in fresh water; and that he himself suffered fifteen days for every three days' immunity. But in the winter, when north winds are constant, the climate is healthy enough. The sky is nearly always clear; but in January and February an occasional shower of rain occurs.

The wealth of Siwa consists in its date-palms, which vastly outnumber the other trees in the oasis. No stately dohm-palms are found here, as in other oases of the Sahara. But, besides the date-palms, there is a sprinkling of fruit trees and a considerable number of fine olives. Of the former, there are apricots and pomegranates, and a few fig, plum, and apple trees. Vines also flourish; but no oranges or lemons, although Rohlfs saw some of these trees at Kamissa, which in his day was the most luxuriant part of the oasis.

To manure their trees, the Siwans use a thorny plant called *agul* (which camels like to eat) and also the dead leaves of apricot trees. The *agul* is collected in bundles, three of which go to a donkey-load, and then is buried in pits, at the roots of the date-palms, receiving water for six days.

There are four or five different kinds of dates; the finest quality, *Sultáni* and *Rhazáli*, are exported to Egypt. *Lakbi*, or palm-wine, is extracted from the trees when the dates begin to redden. But this being a

forbidden practice, among the Senussi, it is not openly avowed.

Owing to their primitive implements, the natives have given up the task of cultivating more land than is absolutely required for their needs: thus, several fertile



OIL-MILL AT AGHORMI

plots near Siwa have been abandoned. The greater part of the soil is capable of raising grain. Barley, wheat and beans are grown in small quantities—by no means sufficient for the population, the first-named being the principal crop; and a few vegetables, chiefly cucumbers and onions, are seen in the gardens. Not

that the Siwans are by any means a lazy community: on the contrary, they may be regarded as industrious, compared with other Lotos Eaters. Apart from their trifling industries, in which women chiefly engage, they spend a good deal of their time in the fields, in tending the palm-trees, or in irrigating the land.

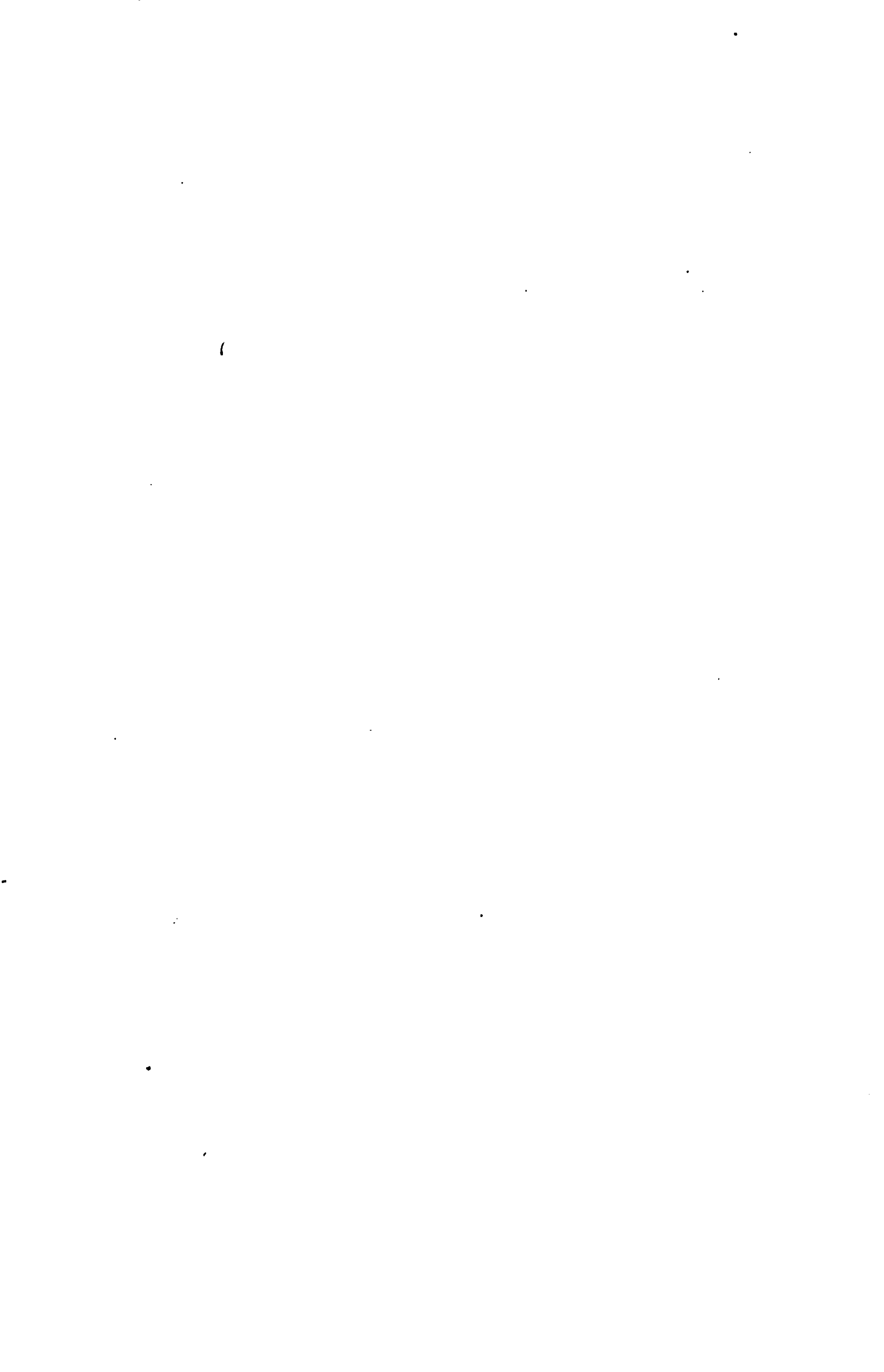
As regards irrigation, some care is taken to make the most of the water-supply; and I did see one attempt at drainage into an adjoining *sebkha*: but I believe there is no lack of water. Brooks run in every direction from the water-holes, which form so many circles of irrigation. Proprietors of land have the exclusive use of their nearest water-supply for one day, each in rotation; and the water never fails them, except, it may be, when the 'evil eye' of a Christian falls on it.[1]

Sheep and goats are introduced by the Waled Ali, from the Coastal Plateau; and donkeys are brought from Egypt. These, with the exception of an occasional ox, buffalo, or miserable cow, are the only animals kept in the oasis. Camels come in any number; but they do not live and thrive in Siwa. Apart from the restricted pastures, all animals suffer from the vicious bite of a large grey fly (not the *tsétsé*, of course) which makes life unendurable for beasts as well as uncomfortable for human beings. Some of these flies followed our caravan for several days, after leaving Siwa.

[1] The water at Ain Hammam dried up after the visits of Browne and Hornemann.



SIWA: A WATER-HOLE



The absence of bird-life mars the charm of the oasis. Formerly there were large numbers of wild pigeons, as in Rohlfs' time: but when I was there, not one was to be seen, even at Ain Hammam, or 'pigeon well,' which they have haunted for centuries.



DONKEYS TREADING GRAIN

In their place, a few ragged-looking fowls scratch about disconsolately.

In the recent Census of Egypt, the inhabitants of Siwa figure as 2,500 males, and 2,500 females. I thought this arrangement was too ideal to be true; and so I made enquiries on the subject. Mohammedans

do not like to be numbered, especially when there are taxes looming up in the background; nor have the lower orders very precise notions as to figures. The estimate of the Egyptian Government, though a fanciful one, is, however, not very far from the truth. It errs chiefly in respect of sex. In this blissful oasis there are, according to the Mamur and the sheikhs, three women to every man. Both these authorities agreed in fixing the total population of the oasis at about 3,000. But in this respect I fear there must be a discrepancy. All previous estimates have been higher, except Drovetti's. Minutoli gave 8,000; Hamilton, 4,000; Caillaud, 5,000; Rohlfs, 5,600. Rohlfs' estimate was based on the number of fighting men (600 + 800 slaves) multiplied by four: a fairly accurate method, in default of a better.

Adopting the same plan, we have, for the present day, 1,000 fighting men (being the number actually engaged in the combat that took place one year before my arrival at Siwa) multiplied by four, with, perhaps, another 1,000 added, to account for the exceptional predominance of the female sex. There must be fully 5,000 inhabitants in the oasis, of whom only a small proportion, less than one-fifth, live outside the town of Siwa and in its immediate suburbs, such as Menshîa, Sebûkha, &c. Aghormi has 200 inhabitants; Kamissa, 70; Zeytun, 30. *Quantum sufficit*: it is not to the interest of the Siwans to over-estimate the population.

The inhabitants of the oasis are undoubtedly of the Berber stock, and their language is a dialect of the Berber, or Tamasirt, in which many Arabic words have become enshrined. Like all sedentary Berbers, who have intermarried with the Negroes of the Sudan, they



WINNOWING GRAIN

are darker than the hill folk. The purest Berber type is that of the Tuareg of the Sahara and the mountaineers of Marocco, who never condescend to Negro alliances. The Siwans have no trace of the noble bearing and fine features of these splendid bandits. They are, for the most part, of singularly unprepossess-

ing appearance. Without being Negritic—though many have curly hair, full lips, and flat noses—they preserve characteristics of their aboriginal race, subject to the variations of type due to local conditions: for Siwa has always been an important place of call for caravans traversing North Africa. The Arab type, especially the Waled Ali, is seen only in a few exceptionally favoured individuals; and I saw no sign of Fellah or Copt.

The average Siwi, or Siwan, has a yellow parchment-like skin (which, with his red skull-cap, gives him almost a Chinese appearance,) or a dark-brown complexion; high cheek-bones; straight hair, and dark eyes. Most of them have a cadaverous, and many a fierce and brutalized expression of countenance. Men and women are fairly tall, but of poor physique, though they walk proudly. Boys and children are not attractive.

Hamilton states that, according to the information he received: 'every vice and every indulgence is lawful to the Siwaia; nothing is forbidden to them, except the presence of a Christian.' Of their fanaticism in this respect I have said enough; of their self-indulgence I saw nothing: perhaps the Senussi influence is beginning to be felt. They are, undoubtedly, jealous of their women, exclusive and suspicious towards strangers, intractable, proud and fierce, fanatical and superstitious. In fact, they are *exaltés* in everything.

But they are, in their way, hospitable to the human *flotsam* and *jetsam* that drift to their island home; and they have complete confidence in one another. Most Siwans have amulets and charms on their person; and over the lintel or on the roof of nearly every house one sees earthenware pots, inverted, to ward off 'the evil eye.'

One of the sheikhs told me that there were only 800 Senussi in the town of Siwa: but this is difficult to believe, in view of the fact that all the Rharbyin are acknowledged Senussi, as are also a moiety of the Sherkyin. The reason of this low estimate being given to me may be found in the fact that, as previously mentioned, the Senussi hide their adherence to the confraternity under a cloak of an allied or friendly sect. There are Maliks, an Orthodox sect, and at least one other Order at Siwa; but the Senussi, though the youngest to take root in the oasis, predominate both in numbers and influence.

I have repeatedly mentioned, that the Siwans fall under two great divisions or parties, mutually hostile, the Rharbyin and the Sherkyin. As their names imply, the Rharbyin are 'of the west,' the Sherkyin 'of the east': but whether denoting residence in particular quarters of the town, or their racial origin, is by no means clear. Rohlfs regarded the Sherkyin (or, as he called them, the Lifaya) as the aboriginal inhabitants, and the Rharbyin as incursionists from the west. But

there does not appear to be any ethnic distinction between the two parties, though intermarriage is strictly prohibited; neither, at the present day, do they keep so rigidly to the particular quarters of the town that formerly were evidence of the applicability of their respective names.

The Rharbyin and Sherkyin continue to live apart in distinctive localities of the town, and each party has its own date-groves. But nowadays, instead of always quarrelling and fighting when they meet, they observe a friendly, if non-committal, intercourse. This better state of affairs is due partly to the conciliatory and wise policy of the present Egyptian Mamur, but chiefly to the fact that, exactly twelve months prior to my arrival at Siwa, the two hostile factions met in mortal conflict, and 160 men were killed. I was told by Sheikh Abdulla that those 160 men included all the bad characters of the place: but this *ex adverso* statement was less reliable than the reason assigned by the Mamur, that the rival parties, having been 'blooded,' would keep the peace for a time.

The origin of the fight was characteristic. A Sherkh woman wanted to marry a Rharb, and fled to his house. The Sherkyin went to fetch her away. Fighting ensued; and, after it was over, the Mamur arrived from Damanhur, with 100 camels and soldiers, and composed their differences. It was not a question between

Senussi and anti-Senussi: because all the Sherkyin were united in their opposition to the Rharbyin.

The way in which they fight, too, is noteworthy. Drums are beaten on both sides; and the combatants meet face to face at the assigned place, which, in this instance, was in the gardens contiguous to the spot where I pitched my camp. After an exchange of compliments, and some prancing about, the rival parties advance in groups or singly, and discharge their guns—not from the shoulder, but held out at arm's-length. Language flies about like brick-bats. Each man, after firing, retires: only one shot being allowed him. Meanwhile, the women, armed with baskets full of stones, take up their position in the rear, but within the fire-zone, and encourage the men of their party or throw stones at malingerers and cowards.

So clannish are the Siwans, that to insult a villager is to insult the village itself. In the good old days, too, disputes in the *Mejli*, or town council, were settled by fighting. If a small matter, one day would suffice to clear up the difference; but grave issues required a prolonged discussion of this character, punctuated by the pop of guns. (Westminster papers, please copy.)

Both the Rharbyin and the Sherkyin are sub-divided into three tribes or clans. Their two principal sheikhs sit in council, together with the Egyptian Mamur and the Kadi. Formerly, the *Mejli* was attended by a

mufti and presided over by the sheikh el-belad. But at the present day, now that the oasis is becoming more and more subject to Egypt, the Mamur presides over the deliberations of the council, and exercises a controlling influence within certain limits.

Crimes against the Civil Code are punishable by the —I had almost written *kurbash*, but remembered in time that this instrument has been abolished in Egypt. Crimes are, at least, subject to liquidation, the whole or the moiety being paid off in dates, the quantity of which depends on the enormity of the offence. Most disputes, according to the Kadi, are about land or water. Murderers are sent to the convict establishment at Tura: formerly they were handed over to the family of the victim, who dealt with such monsters in accordance with their deserts or in direct ratio to the wealth of their date-palms.

All fines, however, go to the up-keep of the mosques or as charity to ship-wrecked strangers, who, perhaps after having been plundered in the desert, are given free quarters and full liberty to eat as many dates as they please, strictly *in situ*. The dates are all stored in a large court; but, such is their confidence in one another, that, the various heaps lie close together and are not protected in any way.

Dates are the staple product and the common diet. Only the richer people, the plutocrats, ever eat anything else. Those who can afford it, have unleavened

bread (a kind of dough, mixed with oil, or baked with dates inside) and take lentils and other vegetables or fruit with their food. They seldom eat meat. Many families have a sheep; very few have an ox, a buffalo, or a cow: but the butcher is rarely summoned, except in cases where the veterinary surgeon has given up 'all hope.' When an animal is sacrificed, no portion of it is considered unfit for human food. It is cut up into small pieces, the prices of which are determined by the value of the whole beast. (For a sheep, which I bought for my men, I gave fourteen shillings.) All merchandise is, in fact, sold by measure or by lot.

The dress of the men is a long white shirt, with drawers, a skull-cap of cotton or a red cap of Tunisian fashion (sometimes a *tabush* without a tassel, more rarely a turban), and a *milaya* thrown over the head and shoulders. The poorer classes wear an old sack, or what looks like one, and nothing else, except a cap. The rich men are handsomely and cleanly clad. Yellow marocco shoes with stout soles protect the feet.

The women wear (at least, so we are told) a long white shift or a dark-blue shirt, etc.; and over their shoulders and head they throw a blue-striped *milaya*, similar to those worn by the Felláhin women. They pay great attention to the dressing of their hair, which is plaited into sundry wisps and braids, like a mop, ornamented with silver coins. Silver and copper rings and ornaments bedeck their person and encircle

their fair wrists, ankles, and neck. They were not so particular to hide their faces from me, as they ought to have been, when I met them in the oasis: though all went through the form of covering their mouths. But in or near the town, whenever I encountered women, they scurried away like rabbits or, if unable to escape, turned their faces to the wall and waited until I had passed them.

It is said that the women are not allowed to eat *Sultáni* dates because these make them too voluptuous. Nor are they allowed to dance, as the men do. They marry young; and they spend most of their life in the *harîm*, attending to the household, manufacturing baskets (of excellent workmanship) or mats, and even domestic utensils out of the same fibrous material. These, with large earthenware pots, constitute the industries of Siwa.

The men are reported to be very jealous of their womenfolk (in spite of being one to three) and to prohibit all unmarried girls from leaving the house at all. Indeed, only the mature women are said to be allowed any liberty in this respect; although I certainly saw many figures that did not bear the weight of years drawing water at the pond near which my tent was pitched. They are not suffered to live outside the town, except as abandoned characters. But in regard to this regulation, as well as other customs concerning unmarried youths and widowers—who formerly were

permitted to visit the town only between sunrise and sunset—I understand that more liberal views are gaining ground, in conformity with the policy of the Mamur, who is seeking to promote migration into various parts of the oasis.

The efforts of the Mamur appear to be meeting with success. He informed me that he had largely succeeded in inducing the men to go about the oasis unarmed. Up to a year or so ago, no man was ever seen without his gun: he took it with him even into the mosque, and laid it at his feet during his devotions. The tribes having been pacified, at least for a period of time, many families are building houses for themselves in the oasis. Though savage and fanatical, they submit to the overlordship of Egypt, and even pay their taxes, under pressure. The Mamur, too, has introduced a currency—partly Turkish, partly Egyptian—which is taking the place of barter. Altogether, the Mamur, as he himself told me, is doing a lot of good.

There are reported to be no less than 300,000 trees in the oasis. The Egyptian Government levies a tax of two piastres (about 5*d.*) on each date-palm and olive tree, exempting the common *wadi* date-palm, of which there are some 90,000, the fruit of which is given to the camels and other beasts. As the annual taxes amount, I believe, only to 1,700*l.*, there must be many trees that pass untaxed.

It would be interesting to know, whether the

Senussi Mahdi pays taxes to the Egyptian Government. It is certain he owns a great many trees in Siwa. These are tended by his wekil, who, according to current gossip, has annexed a good many to his own property.

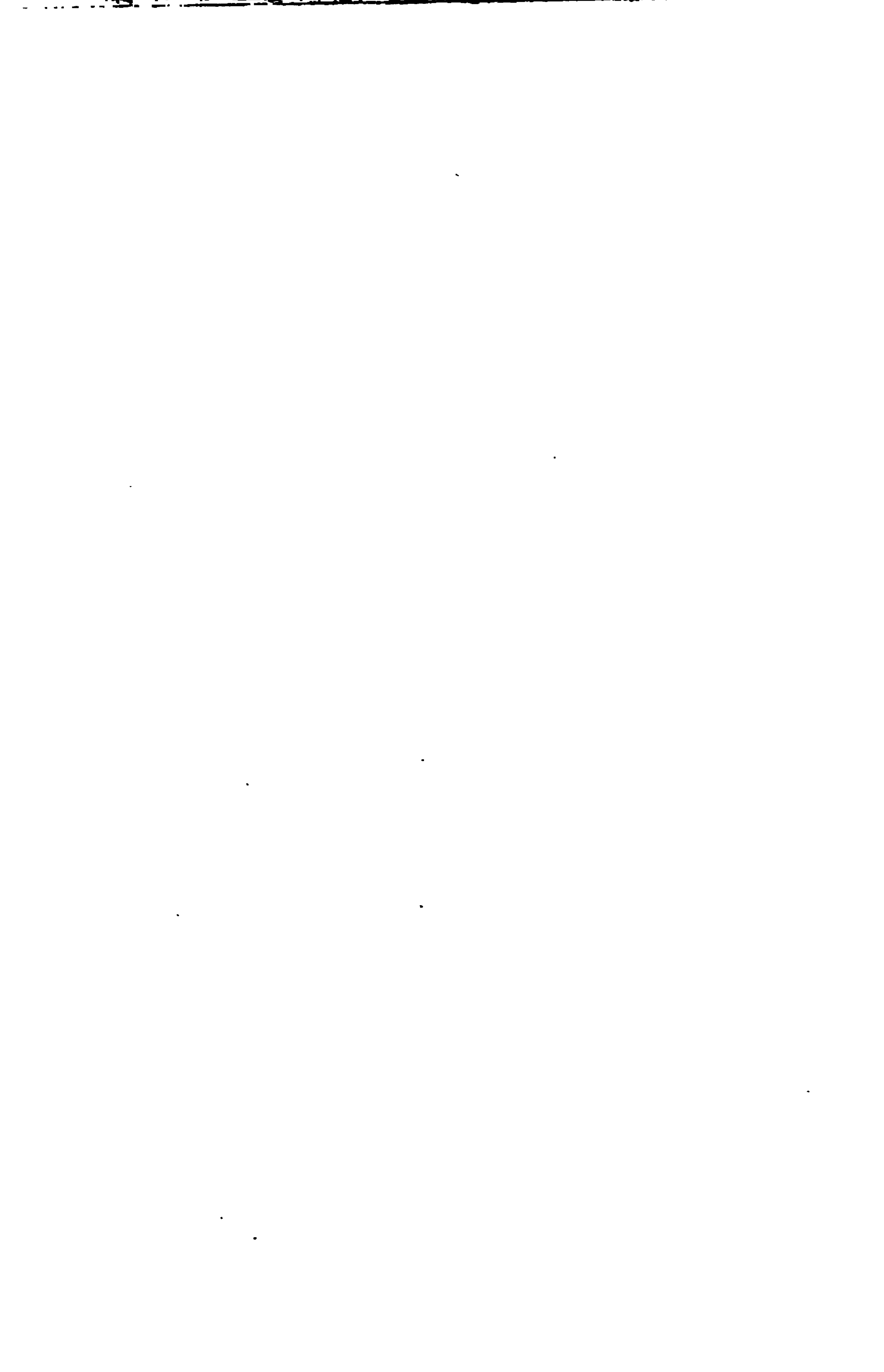
On the whole, the Siwans have no reason to complain of over-taxation. But, as they receive nothing in return, except a Mamur, four other officials, and twenty or twenty-five policemen, whom they would gladly dispense with, they naturally accept their civic burdens without gratitude.

About 30,000 cwt. of dates are exported to Egypt, in exchange for grain, beans, knives, scissors, powder, soap, mirrors, matches, sugar, tea and coffee, dried vegetables, woollen stuffs, blue and white cloths, *milaya*, handkerchiefs, and leaf-tobacco. Most of their tea, of which they consume large quantities, or at least the better kind, comes, I believe, from Benghazi. From the west—*i.e.* the Barbary States—come also sheep, grain, dried meats, Arab *burnûs* and mantles, woollen coverings, *tabushes*, ornaments, and yellow marocco shoes, in exchange for dates.

The western traffic is in the hands of those enterprising merchants and slave-traders, the Mojabra. The eastern traffic is practically the monopoly of the Waled Ali—now more or less tractable subjects of Egypt—who follow the Coastal route, through their own territory, to Alexandria. The Cairene traffic is



SIWA: THE MARKET-PLACE.



shared by the Arabs of Kadassi, a village near the Pyramids, and a great meeting-place for caravans.

Siwa is, thus, an important commercial and distributing centre, connecting Egypt with the Barbary States and the Sudan. But the Siwans themselves rarely venture beyond their own oasis: none go westwards, except on business to Jarabub, and very few to Egypt.

During the date season, from October to the beginning of March, caravans of 100 camels are met almost daily along the eastern routes. In good years, more than 10,000 camel-loads, each weighing 3 cwt., are exported from Siwa. This represents about three-fourths of the total yield of the oasis, the remainder being kept for home consumption.

Slaves work in the fields; slaves live in the town—some in their own quarter, some in families; and slaves pass through Siwa on their way to Alexandria and Constantinople. All these slaves come from the Sudan, viâ Jalo or Jarabub. None can be bought or sold, legally, in Siwa. But that they are brought to the oasis, by the Mojabra, and fed up for the market, after the exhausting desert march, there can be little doubt. Those exported to Egypt and Constantinople are mostly boys; and these are smuggled through by the Mojabra, two or three at a time, with each caravan, as brothers or relations—the deception being all but impossible to discover.

In their own quarter of the town of Siwa there are slaves who live in independence, under their appointed sheikhs. They know they cannot be held against their will. Not long ago, ten slaves escaped from their masters, and joined a caravan going to Cairo. But if slaves demand manumission papers, the Mamur refers them to Damanhur—a long journey.

It is clear that Egypt could not enforce the strict letter of the law in an oasis so remote and so lightly held as Siwa, without raising serious political issues; although, at the same time, the more serious abuses of this Traffic are checked and controlled. Domestic slavery at Siwa does not, from all accounts, sound worse, *cœteris paribus*, than domestic slavery in Mayfair.

The frontier between Egypt and Tripoli is drawn in the air. For one hundred miles west of Alexandria, Egyptian activity is chiefly represented by the coast-guard service. Beyond that is a sort of no-man's land. But the Siwans draw the line somewhere. They draw it at half-a-day's journey west of their town, and affirm that it extends northwards. They regard Jerjub, on the Mediterranean, as their natural port. This is their nearest harbour, within eight days' journey, by camel, from Siwa.

Should the Mahdi raise the banner of revolt and enter upon a path of conquest, Jerjub will be the Suakin, Gara will be the Berber, and Siwa the

Khartum of the Senussi Question. As for Jarabub, that, so far as Egypt is concerned, will be their Omdurman. Perhaps a light railway from Jerjub to Siwa, and the creation of oases between Cairo and Gara, may some day become a question of practical politics.

In concluding this chapter, I must apologise to the reader for having kept him so long waiting on the threshold of Siwa: but it was absolutely necessary for him to be properly introduced, in order that he may now follow in my footsteps, as one having knowledge of the people who were my hosts and of the conditions under which I acted.

CHAPTER XV

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

'*Nahárak saîd!*'

Abdul greeted me, meaningly, as I emerged from my tent on the following morning. He was smartly dressed, in honour of the occasion.

'*Nahárak saîd mubárak!*' I responded, cordially, entering into the humour of the situation: the *Nosrani*, or despised Christian, as an unwelcome guest of the Siwans.

On all sides my men hailed me with a hearty *Saîda!* They were in clover, at last: their camels off their hands—being in charge of a native, in another part of the oasis—and with nothing to do but to lounge about, and eat dates. Truly, it was a foretaste of Paradise.

The policemen had removed their tent, and had left us to our own devices. A servant of the Mamur and the sergeant of police were there, and murmured some polite message from their lord and master. 'Yes; I would go and call on the Mamur, as soon as I had had some breakfast.'

Our tents and baggage had been dumped down on the first spot that came handy, after our fatiguing march of the previous day. This was close to the police station, on the outskirts of the town and just off the main road leading to the principal entrance. It was an unsuitable place for a camp, being close to pools of brackish water, the intermixture of the salt and fresh water producing a bad odour. I therefore decided to move the camp to a healthier situation; and accordingly sent for the camels.

A pitch was selected next to the summer residence of the Mamur, about half-a-mile further away from the town. The Mamur's permission having been obtained, we set up our quarters there.

Whilst this change was being effected, I went, with Abdul as interpreter, to pay a formal visit of courtesy to Mahmud Azmi Bey, the Mamur of Siwa.

I found him reclining on his bed, in a room upstairs, and surprised him in a 'brown study.' Poor man! he had much to think about. Why had I come to Siwa? He, himself, had been there ten months, and found it a wearisome exile. There was nothing to see at Siwa. Surely, I was up to something. What was I after? Had I come to spy out the nakedness of the land: peradventure, to 'inspect' him? Egyptian officials are accustomed to being inspected by Englishmen: but where were my credentials?

I read all this in his face and in his embarrassed

greeting. Clearly it was my duty to set his mind at rest, and to avow my true character. I did not, however, feel called upon to broach the subject of Jarabub, and had cautioned Abdul to say nothing about it: because to have enlisted the Mamur as a confidant would have been to court his opposition as an Egyptian official, responsible for my safety.

Mahmud Bey rose and shook hands with me. Then shouting orders to his servant—a lanky boy, with an offensively blind eye, whom I afterwards discovered to be his own brother—in the clamorous voice of a gratified host, chairs were brought, and, after a time, little cups of Turkish coffee.

We exchanged compliments and cigarettes. This ceremonial business took some time. The Mamur had no knowledge whatever of foreign languages, and Abdul was most inefficient as an Arabic interpreter.

After the coffee had been served, I opened the conversation by telling the Mamur that I had purposely brought no letters of introduction to him because I did not wish the Cairene authorities to know that I was going to Siwa. Siwa, I explained, had such a bad reputation, that I preferred to dispense with the usual formalities of Egyptian protection, which might not have been readily accorded to me, after the bad reception given to my immediate predecessor. I was an English tourist, travelling on my own recognisances to keep the peace. I came to study the antiquities of the

oasis, and to see the curious fortress-town of the Siwans.

Mahmud Bey, taking his cigarette from his mouth, replied in grave and decorous Arabic, his face beaming with smiles:

'The Bey, he says, you very welcome,' reported



THE MAMUR OF SIWA

Abdul, who stood respectfully at his side. 'The Bey, he says, Siwa quite quiet now,' etc.

Abdul's English, introduced sparingly, as local colour, may be omitted here. In brief, I was informed by him, that the Bey was prepared to do his utmost to enable me to see the lions of Siwa. He told me all

about the misfortunes of Mr. Blunt; and that he had recovered the greater part of his looted property. The revolver, however, and, I believe, the rifles, were missing. Probably Osman Ismail Habbun, the wekil of Sheikh Senussi, knew where these were: he was a troublesome man that, more troublesome than all the other sheikhs put together. Did I want to see him? Certainly, he would send for him. Also, there was a stout priest (*fekké*) just arrived at Siwa from Jarabub: he would send for him too. Was there anything else he could do for me?

Yes: there were one or two trifling details I wished the Mamur to arrange for me: to wit, the purchase of a sheep for my men, of shoes for the same; etc.

This was quite a state affair. First, the vendors of these articles had to be summoned; secondly, the sheep and the shoes had to be inspected; last, but not least, the price to be agreed upon.

The Mamur, with the full weight of his office, espoused my interests. What? The price asked was preposterous! Did the rascal suppose that the *hawaji* was made of money? Tut! Tut! Tut! (or its Arabic equivalent). The indignant voice of the Mamur shook the walls. I thought he was going to order off both men for summary execution: and so, to save their lives, I requested the Mamur to submit to their exactions. After all, mad Englishmen did not turn up at Siwa every day.





THE SACRIFICIAL LAMB.

'No indeed!' commented the Mamur, 'you are the first European any of us (meaning the Egyptian officials) have seen here. Still, they are rogues, these Siwans.'

I admitted the fact; and closed the bargain.

We then all adjourned to my camp, with a mixed retinue of servants, policemen, and sundry Siwans; and here we were introduced to the sacrificial lamb.

Another introduction had previously taken place. Sheikh Abdulla Hamaïd was presented to me, and attached to my 'staff.' He was, apparently, the pet of the Egyptian officials. The principal Sheikh of the Sherkyin, a full-blown *haji*, and an amiable Arab—or Arabised Berber—he was, during the remainder of our visit, my constant companion and mentor. We became great friends, indeed; and I learnt to like this man for his frank manner and never failing attentions. He was a fine greybeard, who respected himself, and who had remarkably liberal views for a Siwan: but he, having travelled, was, of course, exceptional in this regard. He had been to Lower Egypt, and had acquired a wholesome toleration for the British taskmasters who sojourn there. Decidedly, Haji Abdulla was a serviceable man.

Our new camp was all that could be desired. The Mamur's house, being empty, was placed at our disposal. The ground floor served as a kitchen; a veranda upstairs was a cool retreat for myself; and

the men disposed themselves and their goods along the outside wall, where a convenient mound of mud did service as a divan. My tent was cleaner and more comfortable for night-quarters, for reasons that will be evident when I describe the buildings of Siwa, from which this did not differ.

In one of the outlying huts, a native woman lived, with fowls for her companions. She did most of the catering for us, providing eggs and chickens. Her portrait shows her to be as coy as she was ugly.

During the course of the morning I learnt that the fat *fekké* from Jarabub, on hearing of my arrival, had fled to Zeytun, so as to be out of my reach. Whether he received the Mamur's message, I do not know.

On the other hand, Sheikh Habbun, the wekil of the Mahdi, had been given the command, but did not obey it. As 'the mountain would not come to Mohammed,' I decided to go to the mountain: to visit the town of Siwa and pay my respects to this great personage. Haji Abdulla informed me that there was a great deal of coming and going in the town, and considerable excitement over my visit. They did not know what it portended.

I shrewdly guessed that they regarded me as a forerunner of fresh taxation; or, more probably, they scented my design to penetrate westwards.

'Where is he going to?' 'Why does he come here?'

These two questions were troubling the Siwans even more than they puzzled their Governor. I heard afterwards, that envoys from the town had bombarded the Mamur with requests for an explanation. No wonder the poor man looked perplexed when I first met him that morning. But he had got out of the difficulty with adroitness. He lied magnificently. He told these timid citizens that I had brought letters of introduction from the Mudir, at Damanhur, under whose jurisdiction Siwa falls, and from the Egyptian Government; that I was a harmless English tourist, entrusted with no mission; and that soon I should depart on my return-journey to Cairo. In a word, he quieted their fears, and prepared the ground for my admission into the town.

Thither I proposed to go, on a visit of ceremony, late in the afternoon; but the Mamur suggested, it would be better to let one day pass, in order that the people in the town might be better prepared to receive me with friendliness. I therefore spent the afternoon in exploring the ancient necropolis, Jebel Muta, hard by, and in receiving visitors.

The Egyptian officials came, each in turn, to visit me. These were the officer commanding the police; the doctor, or sanitary inspector; the secretary of the *mamurîa*, a mere lad; and the Kadi. All were most cordial, of course.

As for the Mamur, his friendliness knew no bounds.

He was always devising or procuring something for my comfort or convenience. Two men of the police force were detailed to play at sentry duty, with reliefs, every night in my camp. An order was issued broadcast, that I was to be treated with respect by all who had the fear of God (and of the Khedive) before their eyes. And a proclamation was made in every quarter of the town, that I intended to visit them on the following day, and must be permitted to pass everywhere, without let or hindrance. Even the mosques were not to be closed against me.

My first impressions of the place and people were most favourable. How could these have been otherwise?

An oasis of surpassing beauty! After the toilsome march of nearly three weeks through a glaring desert that varied little in character, Siwa, with its slumbrous shade, its luxuriant vegetation and noble palms, was a garden of the Hesperides. The golden fruit was there to pluck; so also was that dragon of a wekil, who barred my passage to the west. I expected, indeed, that if there was any plucking to be done, I should, in the absence of the famous pigeons, to which I have alluded, get the worst of it. But there was no use in meeting misfortunes half-way. So far, I had reason to be satisfied with my reception. The Mamur had behaved admirably: he was a capital fellow, as I recorded in my diary. And the way had been smoothed for

me to my momentous interview with Sheikh Habbun. I therefore complacently enjoyed the good things the gods provided, and scattered *bakhshish* and presents around me, as harbingers of good-will.

An oasis among oases! Surely there is no other that preserves so religiously its ancient traditions; that has existed in one unbroken line of occupation by the conquering races and peoples of North Africa; that shows absolutely no trace of western civilization, though so near to the gates of Europe; and that, considering its attractions and large population, has been so rarely visited by European travellers? Its hoary antiquity and primitive modernity are its ruling characteristics. Its foundations were laid in mythology; its fame was spread before the dawn of history; its monuments are preserved to this day: broken idols and shattered pillars, the relics of barbarism, over which the sand is drawing a decent shroud.

The spirit of Jupiter Ammon haunts the oasis. The prestige of Modern Egypt holds it with the grip of a policeman. Consider the contrast! Yet, there cannot be an upper without an under, light without shade.

Light and shade are there in the most impressive and expressive medium of Natural Law. Golden sunlight, creating life, and bringing forth the fruit in due season; sterile desert, threatening death, wherever water ceases to flow: herein lies the birth of the oasis. Sunlight and shadow chase one another under the verdant

canopy of palms. Year in and year out, ever the same, reaching to maturity and the second birth. And here was I, thrusting myself into this beautiful cathedral of Nature, breaking in upon its reverent silence—so rarely disturbed, save by the faint murmur of barbarism outside its walls—bearing a palm-branch in my hand and warring thoughts in my heart. Clearly, I was an anachronism.

My ambition struck a discordant note here, though at Cairo it was in sympathy with its vulgar environment: the breaking-down of old barriers, the ruthless exposure of naked barbarism. I represented reform and modern enterprise, whilst all around me bore witness of an imperishable past.

Such day-dreaming was, however, profitless; even maudlin, apart from its gracious setting. The business of the world had to go on; and I meant to get to Jarabub: so there was an end of it.

Thus I strode forth, and looked around me, exalted, yet humbled. The town of Siwa and its adjacent necropolis were bathed in the evening light, hedged round by a wall of mere mud and an impenetrable armour of fanaticism. It seemed difficult to realize it all: the flimsy material structure and the moral impregnability of this ancient citadel. Few Europeans had been allowed within its gates; none had penetrated into its secret recesses. Its doors were now opened to me, and some of its secrets might be revealed, if I



MOUNT SIWA.

behaved myself: but it behoved me to walk circumspectly, lest I should fall into a trap or stumble on the threshold of a Blue-beard's chamber.

In the afterglow that flamed in the western firmament, singing the praises of the vanished sun, this ethereal city, the windows of which formed a mosaic—tier upon tier of empty eye-sockets—looked like the dragon itself which guarded my garden of the Hesperides.

CHAPTER XVI

STRONG EXPRESSIONS

It is not good to dwell in cloudland. When I got back to my camp I was brought down to the earth indeed. Abdul had put his foot in it. I buried him deep in that hole; and my strong expressions must have sent him further.

In my absence, the silly ninny had actually told the Mamur of my secret intentions. This was rank treason.

His reason was obvious. He feared I might succeed in bribing the wekil to let us pass Siwa—Habbun being singularly open to bribery and corruption—and, during my absence, had been gossiping with the quidnuncs of the police station. These gentry, naturally, fed his fears, which had, I knew, been growing every day. And so, under pretext of taking counsel of the Mamur, he had betrayed my trust.

Of course, he denied having any knowledge of my prohibition.

Some men are born liars; others achieve a certain distinction in the perversion of truth: but Abdul owed

nothing to cultivation. Worse than that, he was a fool: he had not even the merit of lying consistently, nor of covering up his failures to deceive me. It was easy to lead him to self-committal disclosures, and so to confound his politics, though not so simple to frustrate his knavish tricks.

I was furious. Before even I had had the chance of negotiating with the wekil, he had raised up another barrier: for it was obvious that the Mamur would obstruct my passage across the Egyptian frontier. In fact, he told Abdul, it would be his duty to do so: since he would be held answerable for my safety.

After I had vented my displeasure on the faithless dragoman, I tried what *bakhshish* would do. I offered him and his men handsome rewards, if he and they would follow me, or rather take me, to Jarabub, even though the wekil could not be bought over to inaction.

His reply to this temptation amounted to this: It is useless. The roads to Jarabub are watched day and night; on dark nights they are patrolled: and any European attempting to pass would be followed to the frontier—half-a-day's journey westwards—where he and his caravan would be attacked and massacred. Six of the chiefs in Siwa town are held responsible for the protection of the northern road; and on the southern road there are people at Zeytun and at Kamissa, whose special duty is to keep watch and ward

over the caravans passing that way. Even though Habbun were corruptible, how should we square the six sheikhs? Still more, how evade the people of Zeytun and Kamissa, not to speak of Siwa, who are more fanatical and less open to bribes than the sheikhs? As for Habbun and the others, they could not control their followers in a matter of such vital importance. Habbun, too, is hated, though feared, by many of his fellow sheikhs, who would gladly do him an injury. And even though all these obstacles were overcome, and we entered Jarabub, the people there would never allow us to leave the town, or, if they did, it would be only to fall upon us afterwards and treat us as they did the so-called Frenchman and his Arab camelmen. No: the project is too risky. What is the good of money, if you lose your life? 'I would not go,' he concluded, 'if you gave me this tent full of gold.'

All this information was elicited piecemeal; much of it was known to me already: I could scarcely doubt its authenticity. Its confirmation by the Mamur added little or nothing to the argument. Besides, knowing Abdul to be a confirmed liar, I could not tell how much he had invented for his own purposes. I must confirm, by direct questioning, every tittle of the facts he was only too eager to accept as established. Still, at the back of my mind, though I refused to acknowledge it then, I knew I was to be disillusioned.

Whether true or not true, whether hopeless or the reverse, nothing could, however, be urged in extenuation of Abdul's treachery.

By the time I had done with him, several atmospheres must have been added to the density inside my tent. Saïd came meekly in to relieve the pressure. Whenever my relations with the men were at all strained, it was always Saïd who accepted the task of peacemaker.

'It is all right,' he said, 'I will go with you to Jarabub; Abdurrahman, too. Perhaps they will let us go past. Abd-el-Gade knows the way.'

'Will Abd-el-Gade go?' I asked, anxiously.

'Yes, if they will let us pass.'

'Ah! always that! Call Abd-el-Gade to me.'

The guide shuffled in, and, at my invitation, squatted on the ground. Saïd interpreted.

'Abd-el-Gade,' I said, 'I want to go to Jarabub. You have been there. How long will it take?'

'Four days, easy travelling.'

'There are two roads; and you know them both. . . .'

'Yes.'

. . . . 'The northern road, you say, is never used now. Could we traverse it without being observed?'

'I think so. But we could not reach it from Siwa, without being detected, even at night-time.'

'Possibly; but we might try. You will take us along that road?'

'If the sheikhs say we may go, I will go.'

'Not otherwise?'

Abd-el-Gade did not reply. But his answer lay in his embarrassed silence. Damn![1]

It was useless to carry the matter further. Without Abd-el-Gade we could not move. It remained to be seen what might be done with Habbun. Though apparently hopeless, I would not abandon hope. It was too exasperating!

That night, before retiring to rest, I wrote in my diary: 'I shall not despair until I am still further convinced of the futility of the attempt. There are people here who, no doubt, would not forcibly obstruct me; but the majority would most certainly carry out the orders of the Senussi Mahdi, to prevent all Europeans passing to the west, and to kill them if they persist. Even Moslems and Senussi may not enter Jarabub without permission.'

The clamour from the town that night had a deeper meaning for me: it menaced me, even in my dreams. Once my purpose were divulged, I could not count on the friendliness of the Siwans; if openly avowed, I should inevitably court their hostility.

The low voices of the sentries, chatting outside my tent, were a pleasant lullaby. Perhaps, after all, they were not merely ornamental?

Wahèd! Wahèd!

[1] An execration (*lapsus calami*).

CHAPTER XVII

ON GUARD

THE mind of man has a wonderful knack of precipitating, during the hours of slumber, a correct solution of troublous thoughts that appear to be hopelessly mixed in the imperfect light of evening. Sunrise revealed my plans already crystallized. My policy reflected the daylight, and was as clear as the day.

I was not responsible for my dragoman's indiscretion. He had no authority from me to mention my project of going to Jarabub. Therefore, as between the Mamur and myself, the matter had no official recognition. On the other hand, Mahmud Bey and I might conveniently discuss the hypothetical case of a European being able to pass Siwa on his way to the Senussi sanctuary.

This casuistry was in sympathy with Senussi diplomacy—so infected was I by the spirit of the place: it would serve my purpose without laying myself open to the humiliation, even the danger, of a rebuff. It would be humiliating to be turned back by the Mamur; but it would be positively dangerous, for myself and my caravan, for me to openly discuss the matter—in its

present light—with the Senussi sheikhs, who are sworn to carry out the orders of the Mahdi. The latter might in that case interpret it as their duty to kill the 'bird in the hand.' But, such was their inherent capacity for compromise, and their need of avoiding complications with Egypt, that, conceivably, they too would enter into a discussion of the hypothetical case as a sufficient and less risky settlement of the matter. A nod is as good as a word, and better to a man who chooses to be deaf.

I did not for a moment suppose that my purpose would be hidden from the Senussi, even if it had not already been disclosed to them. Now that the Mamur had been informed, it was inevitable that the wekil also should hear of it: in any case, he must have suspected me. The essential point was to avoid making it a direct issue: shall I or shall not I be permitted to pass Siwa? For until the facts, as stated to me, were confirmed by the authorised representative of the Mahdi, I refused to abandon my project.

When, early in the morning, I went to visit the Mamur, I noticed a distinct change in his manner. He, like myself, was 'on guard.' Not that he was perceptibly less friendly: on the contrary, he was as hospitable as before. But he appeared to be worried and embarrassed by the change in our relationship; and he avoided my gaze. He began to speak as the Mamur of Siwa, deliberately, as if weighing his words.

And his words were sufficiently weighty, though eventually carried off with a laugh.

After compliments and coffee, I put several direct questions to him, with the object of elucidating doubtful points, Abdul interpreting. From the hypothetical case of a European I boldly diverged to the extent of using myself as an illustration :

'What! do you mean to tell me that if I, for instance, attempted to pass to Jarabub, the Siwans would stop me?'

'Assuredly, and kill you too if you resisted.'

'And where does Egypt come in? Surely we are in Egypt?'

'Yes, and for a short distance to the west——'

'Beyond which——?'

'Beyond which even I dare not pass. I wish I could! I wish,' added the Mamur, effusively, spreading out his hands, 'I wish I could go with you!'

He had 'let the cat out of the bag': and we both laughed immoderately, so excellent was the joke.

'Well! well!' I rejoined, 'as neither of us intends to go to Jarabub, it doesn't matter. But, all the same, the position is ludicrous. Here are you, the Mamur of Siwa, with twenty-five policemen; and you cannot go for more than a day's excursion without permission of the Senussi. Here am I, a simple English tourist; and I cannot for the same reason extend my journey to the west. It is preposterous!'

The good-natured Bey shrugged his shoulders, in submission to his fate. And for all practical purposes our discussion of the subject ended there.

I could not, after what I had said, though indirectly, in renunciation of my plan, have taken advantage of his confidence in me to give him the slip. I made up my mind then and there to give him due notice if I found the circumstances less inimical than they were represented to be. And I believe he understood and trusted me: at least, his cordiality returned with renewed zest; and he invited me to dine with him that night.

Later in the morning, Sheikh Abdulla conducted me to Aghormi, Umma Beyde, and the Fountain of the Sun. But I reserve a description of these interesting localities for a more convenient opportunity, being concerned at present only with the all-important issue of my political enquiries.

As with the Mamur, so with Sheikh Abdulla, though with greater caution, I returned again and again to the points on which I required confirmation and which he as persistently sought to evade. At last, driven into a corner, and perspiring with perplexity, he blurted out the crude facts. He became quite excited by their narration; and it was evident that the matter touched him very closely: his voice was grave, and his manner was of one who spoke with authority.

Here was another confirmation. Still, Abdulla, though a prominent sheikh, was not the wekil of the

Mahdi. Only from the latter would I accept the last word on the subject: and so to Cæsar I would go.

In the evening, the Mamur gave a dinner in my honour, to which the five Egyptian officials came in full dress. Knives, forks and a spoon were placed before



AGHORMI AND UMMA BEYDE

me: but as this was an Arab meal, to be eaten in Arab fashion—with the fingers—I, of course, declined to use unnecessary tools, preferring to do as the others did.

It was a curious experience. We had over a dozen dishes—soup, meats of doubtful origin, and several unknown *plats*—all served rapidly; but only one sweet:

a kind of syrup made out of nuts, I believe. The dishes were plumped down in the middle of the table, round which we sat in a circle—like camels before their fodder; but no one touched them until I had first helped myself. Then they went for them, like children at snapdragon.

Spoons were used for liquids; but for the solids two fingers of the right-hand served the purpose. It was not nice, tearing pieces of meat from the mother-bone, and eating it, like a dog: but I did it. I tasted everything in this fashion; and survived. We drank water only.

Afterwards we had tea, Siwa style—many cups of it—and cigarettes. Finally, coffee and speeches.

Abdul was called in as interpreter. He made short work of the Oriental extravagance of language in which, as befitting to the occasion, I indulged, clipping my compliments to their baldest equivalents and covering up his deficiencies with gesture-language, illustrating 'all that sort of thing, don't you know.' It was particularly aggravating to me to have a courteous phrase turned into a curt *quiès* (good): but it is surprising how much one can understand, even of an unknown tongue, by following the facial expression of the speaker. Abdul was nervous on this state occasion, and did not do justice even to himself: but no doubt we all realized how peculiarly gratifying it was to have the distinguished honour of supping together.

As for the doctor, who sat next to me, because he had the reputation, but not the gift, of speaking and understanding English, he would persist in calling me 'Your Excellency,' even after I had declined his invitation to dinner on the following evening. But as a European, the first they had seen at Siwa, I was *rara avis*, and, being of the English variety, one to be made much of.

They get a camel-post from Egypt every six or seven weeks; but, as regards the attractions and conveniences of civilization, they might be living in Central Africa and enjoy as many. Truly, theirs is an exile in effect if not in fact, unless they happen to take an interest in their work and surroundings. After eighteen months or two years of it, they are quite ready to return to the fleshpots of Egypt, even though an English plain cook doth now perform the duties of the former French *chef*, resigned—but showing precious little resignation.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TOWN OF SIWA

I PAID five visits to the town of Siwa. The first was complimentary, partaking of the nature of an official reception and inspection; the second included my principal interview with the wekil of the Mahdi; the third was the most comprehensive, topographically, during which I penetrated into the innermost parts of the old town; the fourth and the fifth were to the immediate outskirts, within the walls, at the base of Mount Siwa.

On the first visit, I was accompanied by an imposing retinue; on the second, by a selected number of the same; on the third and following occasions, by Sheikh Abdulla, Abdul, and a *ghaffir* (watchman).

On the first occasion, I took my revolver and many misgivings; on the second, I went unarmed, and with confidence; and on the other visits my camera was in constant requisition. Owing, however, to a faulty shutter, and to the absence of light in the most interesting parts of the inner town, many of my snap-shots drew blanks or were failures. My illustrations

THE TOWN OF SIWA.



are, however, the most complete in existence, since, I believe, no previous traveller has ventured to take photographs except *in camera*, facilities for which do not exist in a crowded town.

Moreover, if I am to credit what the Siwans told me, I was accorded greater liberty and more facilities for seeing the interior of the town than those given to any other European. But I fancy this was said and done with the sole object of making me contented with the results of my journey, and so to dissuade me from continuing westwards; though, with the exception of Rohlfs, few, if any, of my predecessors appear to have seen with their own eyes many of the most interesting features of this old-world city which they describe. Caillaud's account, for instance, is frankly acknowledged as second-hand, because he was not permitted to enter the town at all.

And yet, in spite of my opportunities, I find it difficult to give an adequate sketch of the topography of Siwa town. Such a maze of streets, such a honeycomb of dwellings, are most bewildering: and it is easy to lose one's bearings. Since similarity of structure and design prevails, there is little to distinguish from the common aspect. Detail is lost in this bizarre medley of tenements, many of which are plunged in tenebrous shade. The general effect is, therefore, all that I recall, and all that may be required in this place.

The town of Siwa, like all the towns and villages of these oases, is founded upon rock. The houses are constructed from materials nearest to hand; and their distribution is determined by the contours and other conditions of their foundation. The whole forms one solid, though friable, rock, sculptured into dwellings, past and through which streets, lanes, rough causeways, flights of steps, tunnels, and galleries lead from point to point—laterally, vertically, spirally.

The houses are, like the town itself, fashioned as a citadel, or they are without form and void. Their architecture is as primitive and practical as that of the beaver. The substance used in their construction is found in the oasis. Though the loamy soil has a larger proportion of sand than of clay, the presence of gypsum makes it an excellent building material.[1] Mixed with stones and water, it hardens into a concrete mass. Out of it are made, not only the walls of houses and steps, but also divans, ovens, and, in short, nearly all the household furniture that is required. The roofs and floors are constructed with palm-trees and rushes, the trunks being neither sawn nor cut off, but projecting outside the walls of the houses, if they happen to be too long.

In the thousand or two years of its existence, the town of Siwa has grown—as it were, by accretion—

[1] I did not discover, or rather omitted to enquire, whether lime, which is found in the Coastal Plateau, was used in building. Blocks of stone, sometimes from the Temples, are occasionally utilized.

until, at the present day, it has come to form practically one vast domicile. Lateral extension being impossible, owing to the confined space, vertical building has resulted of necessity. Houses have grown up, one on top of the other, spanning the narrow galleries and



IN THE TOWN OF SIWA

stair-hewn, rocky paths that wind—maze-like—on the face of the hill.

All the houses have three storeys ; some have more. A father who marries his children, builds a home for them above his own dwelling. As in many old towns, subject to the same restrictions, one enters by the main

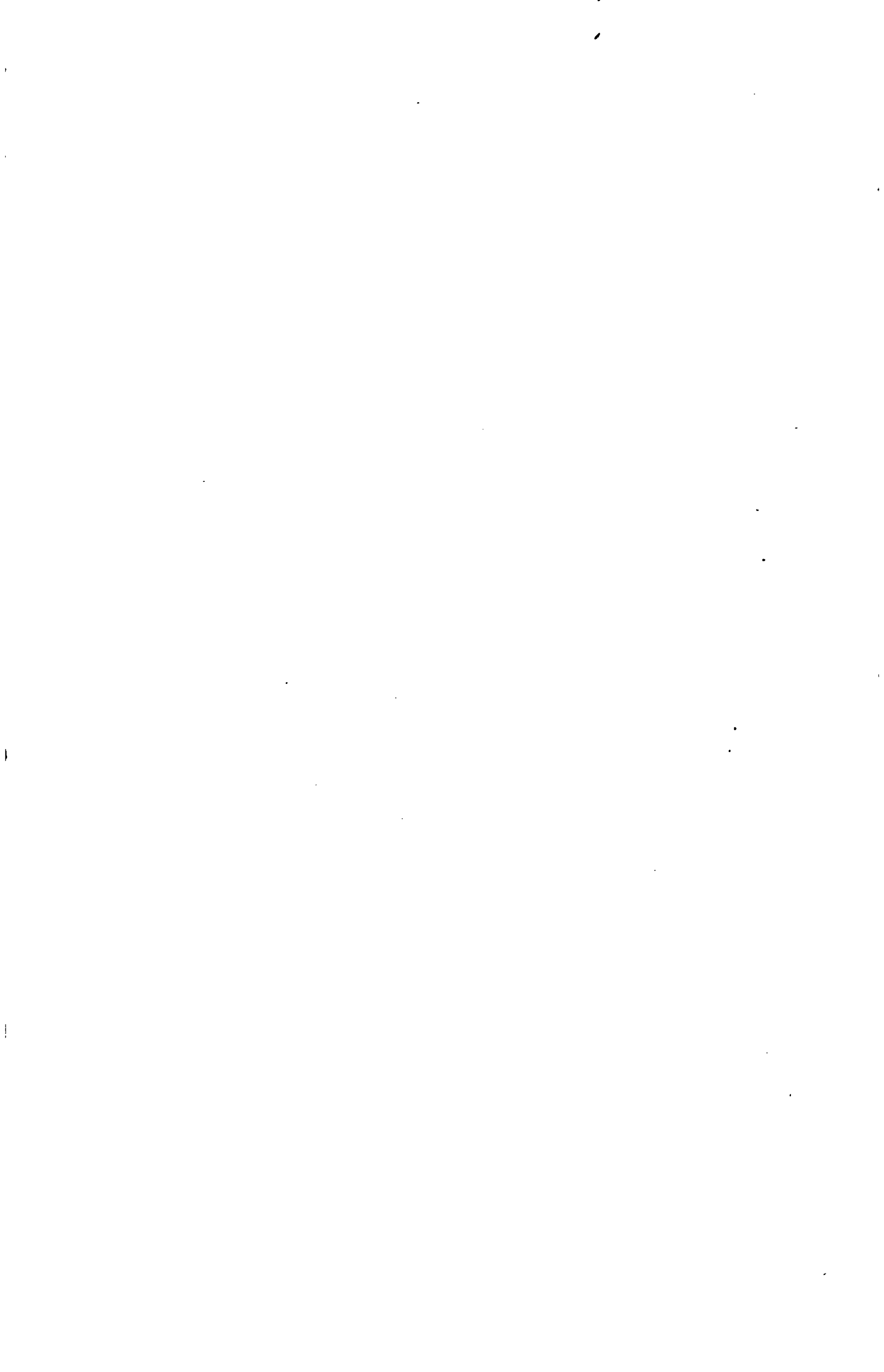
door and ascends a storey or two storeys in order to gain access to another street. Thus, the principal entrance to the old town—through the gate which formerly was the only access—is, as I found to my surprise, through the basement of a house, and up a flight of steps.

A main street, about 10 ft. wide by less than 8 ft. high under the houses, girdles the town, more or less on one level: at night time, one sees lanterns passing to and fro along this thoroughfare. From this artery of traffic, narrow and tortuous paths branch in all directions. These gloomy passages are rarely more than 4 ft. high, and, in places, so low that one has to pass through the tunnels with bended shoulders. Access from the base of the town to its summit is thus gained through a spiral labyrinth of pathways such as these.

In exploring the inner town, I have a confused recollection of darting in and out of houses, clambering up rough rock-steps, clattering down steep and stony declivities, plunging into tunnels—along which one felt one's way, and could not see it—emerging on galleries but dimly lighted through the apertures of an outside wall, and landing—the Lord knows where!—until Abdul, trembling with fright, implored me to return to daylight and to safety.

As we were both unarmed and alone, though under the protection and guidance of Sheikh Abdulla, we were wholly in the power of fanatics, especially in the

SIWA: INSIDE THE WALLS.



dark tunnels. We bumped up against a few men, who, like ourselves, were groping about, some without lanterns; and we surprised several women, who, directly they saw me, fled for dear life, or, their escape being barred, flattened themselves against the wall with their backs towards us. What lovely snapshots I missed, in the absence of a flash-light or any light at all! Not one of my films caught a fleeting ray.

There are four wells in the town. Two of these hold brackish water; only two, with sweet water, have light and air. Few if any of the houses in the inner town appear to have either direct light or ventilation, though all have *à jour* apertures. No wonder typhoid rages in Siwa!

On the lower levels, however, round the base of this human beehive, the houses are open to God's sunlight; and in these, shutters take the place of window-panes. Lower still, there are open spaces—here a water-hole, there a plot for children to romp about, and there a cosy corner for the greybeards and gossips. The streets are clean, the people well clad and orderly.

During the daytime, the town is somnolent—the women in their houses, the men in the fields. At night, there is tom-tomming and dancing.

In shape, rectangular; in circumference, perhaps less than five hundred yards: this is the old town of Siwa.

As a rock-fortress, it has fourteen cr fifteen gates.

Out of one of these you pass in order to reach the adjoining necropolis, Jebel el-Kuffir. Here, if the custodian be willing, you enter, by another gate, the belad el-Kuffir—a sister-town inhabited by Rharbyin. But a large portion of this rock, like Jebel Muta, is honeycombed with tombs, those on the south face being large and well-worked, with handsome pilastered entrances. All that I explored were empty and rifled; only in one, on the ceiling, did I observe hieroglyphs, and these were very defaced.

Yet a little further, in the contiguous desert, there are modern burying-grounds; and, at more than one spot, ancient interments—mounds of sand, over which the two halves of a portion of a palm-tree trunk are laid, side by side: but these latter, being the graves of people long since forgotten and unmourned, are in a ruinous state. The very custom of laying palms on the grave no longer survives.

On the north side of the town are the famous *mestah*, or date-yards. Of these, one belongs to the Rharbyin, one to the Sherkyin, and one is common to both; but all are inclosed by a single wall.

Continuing our inspection, we pass along shady lanes, with beautiful palms and gardens on either side of the low walls, across open spaces, through more streets, past mosques and *kuttabs*—of which there are over a dozen—in and out, this way and that way, until we find ourselves again at the main entrance of the town.



SIWA A COSY CORNER.



All that I have described to you, however, lies within the walls of Siwa town. These walls, from forty to fifty feet high, or higher in places where tenements are utilized, are built of the same substance as the houses. Ruinous in parts, crumbling nearly everywhere, they offer no obstacle to a determined foe. But the men behind the ramparts are fanatics; moreover, they can shoot.

Not only are they fanatical towards outsiders and infidels: they are intolerant even amongst themselves: towards the other towns and the villages of the oasis they exhibit a self-righteous and domineering spirit. Themselves exact in the observances of their religion, they are apt to censure the backsliders of Aghormi, Men'shîa, and Sebukha. Not infrequently, this militant attitude leads to internecine war.

The ancient feud between the towns of Siwa and Aghormi still exists, though of late years it has not been active. Even to this day, however, the Rharbyin of Aghormi do not allow Sherkyin within their walls, in memory of the time when their town was lost to them by treachery and regained only after years of siege.

As for Menshîa and Sebukha, these are, practically, suburbs—summer resorts in the palm-groves—the former occupied by Sherkyin, the latter by Rharbyin.

The Siwans enjoy Home Rule. Perhaps there are twenty or twenty-five sheikhs in the oasis who have

administrative powers—powers derived from the people, who elect their sheikhs by a majority of votes and recompense them, especially those who have to entertain strangers, by free contributions in kind. But for Siwa town, alone, there are twelve sheikhs, more or less, in accordance with the popular will, half of whom are re-eligible and practically hold permanent office, the remainder retiring after a year's service. Four of the headmen form a sort of inner Council, I believe. All deliberations are in public, and are attended by the people, from amongst whom a new speaker occasionally rises to power.

The leading men of Siwa, with few exceptions, impressed me very favourably. All the sheikhs were, I believe, introduced to me. I found them courteous in their manner, even dignified, and absolutely *sans gêne*. A few of them would kiss my hand; most of them clasped it cordially: and only one or two held aloof.

But, of all the notables of Siwa, none exhibited the easy carriage, the commanding mien, and the defiant glance of Osman Ismail Habbun.[1] Usually he rode a handsome Arab mare (which he once offered to lend to me); but when he walked abroad, his firm and swift step, his masterful manner, and the small retinue by which he was usually accompanied, proclaimed him to be the wekil of the Mahdi. Hated he may have been, a

[1] Popularly called Etman Somain Habub: but I am told this is not classic Arabic. He was the richest man in Siwa.

A STREET IN SIWA.

coward he certainly was,[1] a convicted thief, too, by all accounts: but, nevertheless, a ruler of men—the dominant sheikh of the Rharbyin.

This was the man who, of all others, had the power to promote or frustrate my plans. In the former respect his license was limited; but the alternative left him with absolute and uncontrolled authority. This was the man of the situation, whom the Mamur found more troublesome than all the rest of the sheikhs put together: he who is said to have hidden in his house a number of Remington rifles: he who best knows where Mr. Blunt's revolver and guns have gone to. This was the representative of Senussi-ism, the *imperium in imperio* of Siwa. Finally, this was the autocrat who gave me permission to go everywhere, without let or hindrance, except where I specially wanted to go.

[1] During the recent fighting, he showed cowardice. The Sherkyin attempted to kill him; and he sought refuge in flight, disguised as a woman, with the help of Haji Abdulla, Sheikh of the Sherkyin, who was beholden to him for financial services. Thus do great men play hide-and-seek with Nemesis.

CHAPTER XIX

RECEPTION BY THE SIWANS

On the afternoon of the second day after my arrival at Siwa, I set out to pay my first visit to the town—in particular, to call on the wekil of the Mahdi.

The good people of Siwa had been fully prepared, by proclamation throughout the town, for this visit. The Mamur, too, had warned them that I was to be received as a friend. No shouting of *Nosrani!* (See the Christian!); no obstruction; above all, no flinging of stones. On the contrary: a welcome to the stranger within their gates, a European travelling under the protection of the Khedivial Government.

The women were to be put under 'lock and key,' lest, peradventure, my glance should fall upon them; the men, who, ordinarily, were engaged in the fields or in the palm-groves at that time of day, were to gather together to see the Christian pass.

Lest, however, I should offend their susceptibilities—the masses being ignorant fellows, not gifted with the insight of their leaders—by appearing too conspicuously, too offensively European, the Mamur

cautioned me to abandon my white helmet and to adopt a *tabush* (which, for comfort, I always wore in my tent). Thus, habited in a *kaki* suit, I had somewhat the appearance of an officer of the police. The Siwans were familiar with the Egyptian policemen: one more or less, though a European, would make no difference, therefore.

On an occasion of such solemn significance, I necessarily must have a retinue. The importance of an Arab is marked by the number of his obsequious attendants and colleagues, who follow him about and wait on his pleasure. It is etiquette for him, however, to affect humility: to be pressed, positively forced, to occupy the seat of honour, for instance, or to take precedence in anything. The 'chorus' sings his praises on appropriate opportunities.

My self-respect demanded a retinue, therefore—or so I was told, when I objected to so many followers. The Mamur of Siwa could not, of course, accompany me: he remained behind in his castle, counting his golden taxes. And the police were on the alert on the outskirts of the town.

We assembled silently in front of the police-station (the castle afore-mentioned). There were Sheikh Abdulla, the master of ceremonies, guide and introducer; Abdul, dragoman to the *Nosrani*; two men of the Egyptian police force; two of the Mamur's servants; a *ghaffir*; and a non-descript.

Abdulla and I marched ahead; the others followed behind. One of the Egyptian policemen and the nondescript tailed off at the entrance to the town, thus conveniently reducing our party to seven. We clambered up a steep path, and some steps, until we arrived at the house of Osman Ismail Habbun.

He evidently was expecting us, being there to receive me, at the door of his house, surrounded by sundry sheikhs and servants.

'*Ma' es salâmeh!*' (May peace abide with you!), I murmured, giving him my hand, and touching my head and my heart. I had been fagging up this greeting the whole way, being anxious to do the correct thing.

'*Salamât!*' quoth the wekil, *tout court.* And he ceremoniously introduced the leading sheikhs to me.

We were ushered into the audience chamber. This was a large, bare sort of barn, round three sides of which there were divans, made of mud, covered with rugs and mats. Matting also covered the floor; and wooden shutters kept out the blazing sunlight. It was a cool retreat.

Habbun seated himself in a corner, and motioned me to a place on his right.

When we were all settled, Abdul rose, to act as interpreter.

I kept no record of the speeches that were made on this occasion. I remember only that they were of the



STREET SCENE IN SIWA.



most complimentary and extravagant character, subject to the crude censorship of my dragoman.

I drew a moving picture of the toiling caravan, after weeks of hard travel, arriving at this blissful oasis. I expressed my peculiar gratification at the cordiality of my reception. Not a word of Jarabub; not a breath to quicken the Senussi into life; not a glance of suspicion: merely an effusive after-dinner sort of speech.

Habbun replied in terms most gracious, with gestures wholly fitting. A courtly Rharb!

In short, as my diary has it: 'our conversation was, more or less, variations of the expression of our delight at meeting one another.'

Eau sucrée and coffee having been handed round, we rose to depart. Promising the wekil to return on the following day, when we might have a little conversation, as between two friends, free from ceremony, I took my leave.

The last words of the wekil were, that I might go everywhere, throughout the town, in complete confidence of a friendly reception. His glance had lingered more than once on the revolver strapped at my side, though almost hidden under my patrol jacket; and I regretted having brought it: but not having been dissuaded by the Mamur, whom I consulted, and in view of the reception accorded to my predecessors—by the populace, and not by the sheikhs, whom one can trust—I preferred experience to courtesy. I was glad

to leave it behind on subsequent visits to the town, and to substitute a fly-whisk. (I am sure the flies were sympathetic Senussi, from the virulence of their attack.)

We then set out to explore the town.

Our progress resembled an official inspection. Marching rapidly, slightly in advance of my followers, I passed through the streets on the low-level of the town; giving greeting right and left; stopping occasionally to shake hands with the sheikhs who were brought up to me—and who were introduced as the leading men of their respective quarters; ignoring all signs of protest or indifference, ostentatiously made, though silently; and saluting the various groups through which we passed or which had collected together at many points of our passage.

The town was crowded. At every coign of vantage on our route: on balconies, verandas, roof-tops; at the windows and doors of houses; in the market-place and open spaces; in the streets and in the lanes—everywhere, men, in clean white robes, were gathered together to see us go by. Not a word was spoken; no general demonstration of any kind: simply sullen indifference, blended with a decorous but self-apologetic curiosity, or a reluctant return of my cordial greetings. Several of the more rigid Senussi shielded their faces as I passed, so as not to look on me. But only one man, so far as I observed, disdainfully turned his back on me, when I encountered him in a narrow lane, and spat on

the ground to show his contempt for Christians. Many made a pretence of not looking my way; but, on the other hand, many also smiled a welcome or saluted in the ordinary manner. Of course I met 'the oldest inhabitant,' who shook his head over the re-actionary policy of admitting Christians within the sacred precincts: but I entered no mosques, and, on hinting that I should like to see one, met with no response. We stopped also at the house of Sheikh Abdulla, who introduced his son and some light refreshments.

The crowds, and the procession, reminded me—*parva componere magnis*—of the Jubilee in London. Perhaps it, too, may celebrate, though it only inaugurate, in the humblest fashion, a reign of peace and good-will towards men, in the ancient town of Siwa. But that must depend on the policy of Egypt and the programme of the Senussi.

On the whole, I had reason to congratulate myself on the character of my reception. In the nature of things, it could not have been more friendly; and I was assured, as well as convinced by my reading, that no European had been so highly favoured. I attribute this exemption from contumely to my having arrived at Siwa with a comparatively large and well-equipped caravan, to the presents I freely bestowed, and, in particular, to the better state of affairs introduced by Mahmud Azmi Bey, Mamur of Siwa.

He and I shook hands heartily on my return to camp. We were both satisfied.

CHAPTER XX

INTERVIEW WITH THE WEKIL

On the following morning, I decided to 'beard the lion in his den.' In view of the circumstances, which by this time were probably well known to him, and my hint to him at parting, I hoped to find Habbun alone: but in this I was disappointed.

The wekil of the Mahdi was absent when we arrived at his house; but, on being summoned, he came promptly, attended by his usual following.

Greeting me cordially, he expressed satisfaction at my having kept the promise to call again.

'An Englishman,' I replied, ponderously, 'always keeps his word.'

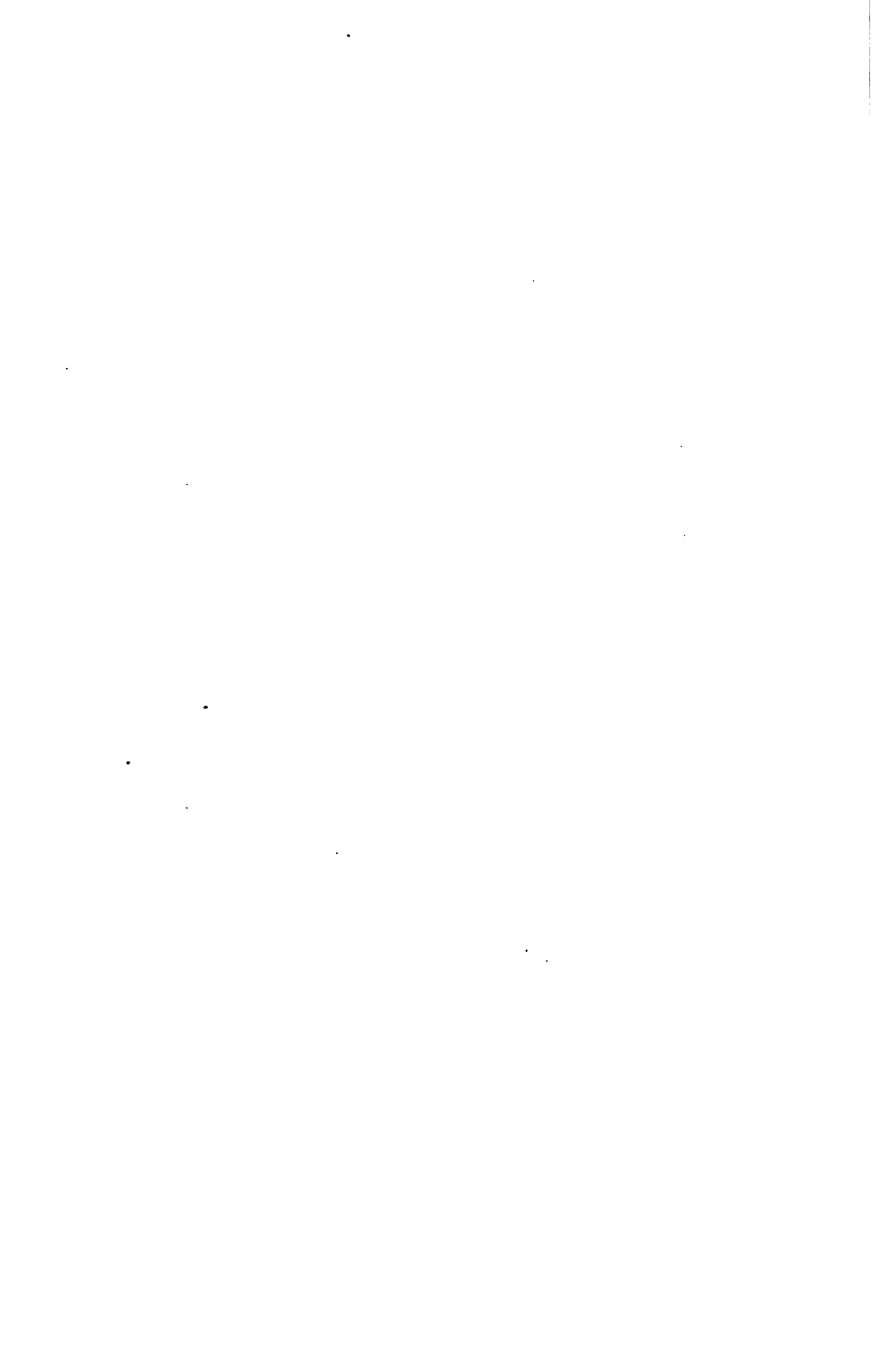
I thought it as well to plant this useful aphorism in the oasis. One never knows what it may grow into: perhaps a demand for British textiles?

We seated ourselves as before, and in the same room.

Habbun was in the corner, with three sheikhs and a non-descript on his left-hand. I sat on his right, with Haji Abdulla and another sheikh on the same side.



INTERVIEW WITH THE WEKIL OF THE MAHDI.



Abdul and three or four servants occupied the third divan.

We were a large company—not at all to my liking: but I had to make the best of it.

Eau sucrée and sweetmeats were introduced, followed by a stately samovar, from Constantinople, in which the wekil brewed his tea.

I was aware, from previous experience, that, at Siwa, it is not etiquette to talk business until your host has made and dispensed at least three small cups of tea. The first cup is pure tea; the second is tea and *nánd* (mint); the third, tea and sugar. After which follow—if the guest is really amiable and wishes to please—six more cups, each stronger and sweeter than the preceding one. Three times three cups of tea are *de rigueur*, in Siwan society. Happily, the cups are small, and the tea, though execrably sweet, is good and well-made: so that the ordeal is not necessarily fatal.

I went through this trial cheerfully, repeating the usual shibboleths proper to the occasion and demanded by the distinguished company in which I found myself.

Of the conversation that followed, I shall try to reproduce faithfully all that was said, departing only from the sequence and form in which questions and answers were addressed and returned: since these necessarily were conveyed through my interpreter, and therefore partook of the nature of halting speeches. I hope in

this way to give a more natural and interesting turn to the conversation, without robbing it of its accurate interpretation.

'Yes; it is a long way from Cairo to Siwa,' exclaimed Habbun, commenting on some remarks I had made concerning the desert march. 'And, now that you have arrived here, there is not much to see. Siwa is a small place. Why did you come?'

'True: Siwa is small; but it is unlike anything I have seen before. Even you, who have travelled to the west, know what it is to arrive at an oasis, at a harbour of refuge, where water is: to find rest, and refreshment, and shade, after the tedious and toilsome tramp through the desert. As for myself, when I entered Siwa, I stepped into a new world. All was new and strange to me: new customs and strange people. All was beautiful—ah! so beautiful!—in this happy oasis. The waving palms and sweet shade; the green crops and rich vegetation: peace and plenty! Surely all this is worth travelling to see, worth any hardships to enjoy? And then your wonderful old-world town! There is nothing like it in Europe. It teems with interest to one who, like myself, makes a study of these things. When I return home, I shall tell my people how fascinating it all is. Do you know, Habbun, that the people of Europe are very ignorant? Many have never even heard of Siwa.'

'It is possible.'

'Yes: most strange it is, that this oasis, which has been inhabited for thousands of years, perhaps, and contains precious monuments of antiquity, should be so lightly regarded. Do you think it can be on account of the people, who prefer to live isolated here? They have not welcomed all Europeans as I have been welcomed, don't you know?'

'——!'

'But all that is changed now. When I go back, I shall tell everyone—the Khediv, too—how friendly has been my reception.'

'You are welcome here. You can stop as long as you like; and go everywhere.'

'I know; I know. There is much to see. First, there are the antiquities: those heathen temples, which, I regret to say, are in a very ruinous state. The very stones speak history. I must write down what they say. You know, of course—or has Abdul not told you—that I am a scribe? No? Well, I am. I go about, and learn all I can concerning interesting people—really interesting people, like the Siwans; and then I write a book, which tells other less fortunate individuals all about it. In this way we acquire knowledge. I have been studying the people of the Nile Valley, for instance; and now I have come on here to learn something regarding your oasis. Ah, by-the-bye, there are people here called Senussi. You must tell me all about them, won't you?'

'I have heard, you already know something about them. How did you learn it?'

'Oh! [with a wave of the hand] books! We learn a great deal in books. And, then, people in Cairo told me there were Senussi here. Now, how many Senussi are there in Siwa? Do they——?'

Here Habbun opened the shutter on his left hand, and bawled into the street. He kept up this farce for some time. I thought it rather rude: but I remembered that Berbers were, as their name implies, barbarians.

I waited until he was nearly done; and then I challenged his attention:

'This tea is really most delicious. Thanks! I will have another cup: one can never have enough of it. It comes from Alexandria, of course?'

'No; from Benghazi. Don't you drink tea in Europe?'

'Yes, indeed: but we make it differently. Personally, I prefer this. But, in regard to these Senussi? I am told that the Sheikh el-Mahdi, who lives at Kufra—he does live at Kufra?'

'*Aiwa.*'

'Thanks!—That the policy of the Senussi is to break up the nomadic life in the Sahara and to settle people in the oases: in other words, to turn roving bandits into peaceable and industrious cultivators. Now, you know, that is a very wise policy. That is why I admire the Senussi so much.'

On this remark being translated to the company, I observed that all the sheikhs began to wag their heads, approvingly. I had made a good impression. When the nodding Mandarins had subsided into their former statue-like repose, I added:

'Everywhere, throughout the Sahara, I am told, there are oases of this character. There are—let me see—there are—oh, there is one quite close to this—Jarabub, isn't it?'

'Yes, Jarabub. It is a small place. I have been there.'

'How interesting! Tell me, what sort of a place is Jarabub?'

'It is a small place. There is nothing to see there.'

'Nothing? Is not Jarabub the place where the Senussi have a University, to teach young people how to grow up in the fear of God [and of the Mahdi, I should have liked to add]?'

'Yes: that is it. Jarabub is a teaching place: nothing more.'

'Well, if that be so, it must be interesting. I, too, am a student. Curiously enough, we know nothing about Jarabub. Are there many people there?'

'No; very few: boys and their teachers. Just a handful of Arabs. There is nothing to see there.'

'Still, I should rather like to go there, if I had time——'

'You cannot go to Jarabub.'

'Why not: is it so far?'

'No: it is not far. But the people of Jarabub do not like Europeans.'

'That, perhaps, is because they do not know us, like the Siwans. I am sure they would treat me well, if I went there.'

'No: you must not go there. We could not let you. You would be hurt.'

'Hurt? Surely they would not hurt me? I could do them no harm.'

'It is impossible.'

I was about to protest anew, when Habbun again had recourse to the shutter trick. I therefore reluctantly turned the conversation into safer channels, in the hope of having it out with my interlocutor under less public conditions. Perhaps he might talk, if only I could get him alone?

I tried to make him pleased with himself and with me. To bear out my character as a geographer and a scribe, which he only partially realized, I gave the company some valuable information about England. I drew a harrowing picture of the toiling masses, working their fingers to the bone in the thousand and one industries which paid for their food. I contrasted their hard lot with the *dolce far niente* existence of the Siwans, their smoky and begrimed cities with the heavenly oasis. 'Look!' I said, pointing out of Habbun's favourite window to the sunlit landscape:

'What sunlight! To draw the breath of life in such a sparkling atmosphere is, in itself, a happiness.'

During this long speech, I was constantly interrupted by Haji Abdulla, who, having travelled, had himself learnt something of the outer world. His running commentary, by no means ignorant, helped to make the conversation general; his description of railways, which he had seen in Lower Egypt, tended to confirm some of my remarks and to whitewash my growing reputation as a Münchausen.

Occasionally, I utilized some pertinent remark to hark back to the subject of Jarabub and the Senussi: but all such attempts to extract information or any definite expressions of opinion were met with evasion. Clearly, I could get no encouragement for my hopes, no exclusive intelligence, from such an irresponsive audience. It became increasingly evident to me, that I must abandon my project to penetrate to Jarabub, unless I was prepared to turn their *non possumus* though friendly attitude into one of open hostility.

Finally, I expressed my thanks to the wekil for his cordial reception and charming hospitality; and was preparing to rise, when it occurred to me, that I might just as well do a little business whilst I had the chance.

'This interview,' I said, turning to Habbun, 'which has been so delightful to me: I should like so much to

carry away a record—a remembrance—of it. Might I send for my camera, and take a photograph of our little gathering?'

The function and mechanism of this uncanny, though innocent-looking, apparatus having been explained—since none but Abdulla had seen one before; and he helped me materially by seconding my proposition—I was accorded the necessary permission, much to my delight and not a little to my surprise.

A messenger was despatched forthwith to my camp, bearing, as a token of authority, some personal article belonging to my dragoman, which the men would recognise.

In his absence, Haji Abdulla told his colleagues that, at Cairo he had seen photographs of people; and that they were on paper, which was very nice and handy.

I prepared for the *séance* by closing the window-shutters, so as to secure a time-exposure; and, in my ignorance of photography, racked my brains as to how long an exposure I should allow. Finally, I decided on twenty seconds.

Presently, one of my men—the big Fellah—entered, bearing my camera and tripod. He shook hands with the sheikhs; but, when he approached Habbun, with the same friendly but familiar intent, the wekil of the Mahdi drew back with dignity. A moment's pause; and then Habbun stretched out his hand, condescendingly. 'Upper Egypt' kissed the hand thus graciously

extended to him, making obeisance to atone for his freedom.

This characteristic touch put me in good humour: I exchanged amused glances with Abdul, who, himself, was inclined to presume on his somewhat dubious superiority as a Cairene Arab, and had occasionally to be snubbed.

Whilst I was arranging my camera, a child of Habbun's was brought in, and placed in the seat which I had vacated.

I explained that, everybody present would have to remain motionless so long as I held up my hand. And in this way I secured two pictures, giving a shorter exposure to the one reproduced in these pages. The lad on the right of the picture, a servant—or, perhaps another son of Habbun's—watched me intently.

When I had done, I was asked to produce the picture. But I explained how impossible it was to comply with this very reasonable request; and, having thanked my sitters, I departed with my precious films, before they had time to realize the etiology of their magic work, against which all rigid and ignorant Mohammedans are prejudiced. Truly, I had carried off their spirits in my infernal machine!

Such were the negative results of my interview with the wekil of the Mahdi.

CHAPTER XXI

MA' LÈSH!

I STILL had another chance, however,—the last!

Habbun returned my visit, as is usual between people of pre-eminent rank, as soon as I had reached my camp. But he did not come alone. Abdulla accompanied him; and his horse, in charge of a servant, with others standing by, awaited him outside my tent.

It was most exasperating! I invited them both into my tent; and then, under the pretence of ordering refreshments for their comfort, I consulted my dragoman, hurriedly, as to the possibility of separating them. Could he not entice Abdulla away, somehow? But neither he nor I saw how this could be done, off-hand, without exciting suspicion.

I returned to my tent in a black mood.

Habbun was looking about him, coolly, as if all the wonders he saw were not so wonderful after all. He fingered one or two things, appraisingly; and I described their uses to him. He accepted mineral water, coffee, and biscuits; but he refused a cigarette: as a Senussi, he drew the line at that.

I saw that it was useless—though I made one or two feints—to fence with him. He was evidently indisposed to accommodate me in any way. It was not to be a duel, then—not even a sordid bargain, between *bakhshish* and broken faith. He was the wekil of the Mahdi, and I a *Nosrani*. Let it be so!

I gave it up then. Frankly, I gave it up. And I let them see this by the turn in my conversation. I spoke of my approaching return to Cairo.

Having entertained my guests to the best of my ability, I got out a few small presents, and pressed them on Habbun, as a slight souvenir of my visit. He viewed them with indifference. True, they were not worth much.

I had brought with me a handsome *burnûs*, which I had intended to give to the Mahdi's brother, in the event of my reaching Jarabub. But Mohammed Sherif was dead. I should, therefore, have presented it to Habbun, had he been more accessible. I might, even then, have given it to him, had Sheikh Abdulla not been there. Sheikh Abdulla had, however, been so very courteous to me, so assiduous in his attentions, that I did not feel disposed to feed his jealousy, having no other gift of similar value with which to appease it.

Consequently, the presents given to the wekil of the Mahdi were much inferior to those already received by Sheikh Abdulla. If ever he comes to know this, he will be mad, as the Americans say.

We parted good friends; and that was the last I saw of Habbun.

When the great man had mounted his horse and ridden away, I had a further talk with Abdulla, who remained behind; and, not mincing matters, now that diplomacy did not count, told him what I thought of it all—Saïd interpreting. I was thoroughly disgusted.

Abdul was my next victim. I called him to me, and asked whether the camels were rested, and ready to start for Jarabub?

'No: they all have sore backs; two of them are slightly lame.'

'Indeed! And the men?'

'Abu has fever. I believe he has eaten too much.' Abu, it will be remembered, was the cook, who suffered from chronic thirst and an amazing, indiscriminate appetite.

'Quite likely! Anything else?'

'Nothing else, Sir.'

'It is enough. *Khalas!* You may go. Wait! let me see: to-day is Wednesday. We leave for Cairo on Friday.'

'But,' interposed Abdul, deprecatingly, 'Friday is our Sunday, Mr. White. The men want to go to the mosque. The Kadi says they ought to go.'

'Hang the Kadi! A precious lot of men yours are! I have not seen one of them praying, the whole time up till now. No, Abdul, that won't wash. Try something

else. You have your marching orders: Friday morning, at seven, sharp. You have disappointed me, Abdul. However, it is finished: *Khalas!* You get no *bakhshish!*'

He smiled at this parting shot, which he knew to be a blank cartridge; and disappeared, sheepishly, behind the flap of my tent, carrying with him some soul-destroying medicine that was calculated to make Abu sit up. I knew what was the matter with him.

Finished indeed it was! One after another my hopes had fallen to the ground.

I could not, in the face of such evidence, refuse to regard the warnings that had been given to me. It was weak of me, I admit. Any serious traveller (though that I did not pretend to be) would have made fresh overtures: but I, convinced now of their futility, refrained. Even if I could have afforded to buy over Habbun, there were still his underlings to settle with, and, after them, the mass of the people, who could not easily be reached and were less peccable. Even if we could have slipped through to Jarabub, the evidence was dead against our ever leaving that place alive; and with footsore and unwilling men, backsore and groggy camels—which, upon enquiry, I learnt, could not be replaced, owing to the absence of any for sale at Siwa—it seemed clearly impossible to succeed. It would have meant fighting, anyway: and that was a responsibility I was prepared to meet only as a measure

of self-defence. So long as we were in Egyptian territory, we were able and willing to look after ourselves; but, if we crossed the frontier, we should challenge the armed opposition that awaited us: in effect, it would be an invasion, after the warnings we had received.

What was our puny party to expect from such a conflict? We should be wiped out: and the dear old Mamur would have to pay the washing-bill. No: certainly, fighting was out of the question—at least, as an issue to be invoked; and evasion, by stealth, now that the roads would be under the strictest surveillance, was a hopeless mirage. Besides, the hot weather was coming on; and I could not afford to dangle, waiting upon events.

The Senussi had achieved a bloodless victory. I was beaten.

Ma' lèsh! what did I care about Jarabub, now that the Mahdi had left? Why, it was merely a sparsely inhabited rock; a second-rate sort of University, for miserable brats of Senussikins! To go there, merely to say that one had *been there*, would be simply a pedestrian feat, devoid of all interest. As my friend Habbun said, there was absolutely nothing to be seen: and he ought to know. Really, the game was not worth the candle. Snuff it out! It was my *bach*. *Ma' lèsh!*

Among the chief *impedimenta* of a traveller in

strange lands is that old-fashioned thing called a conscience. Jetison your conscience, and you can go almost anywhere, if you take with you a sufficient following of armed men. You can always pick it up again on your way home, don't you know. Witness—no: it would be folly, even actionable, to cite instances. For my part, I admire most those explorers who have sought to negotiate obstacles rather than to annihilate them. Their success, as pioneers, may not have been so great, but their wider and fuller experiences as travellers and observers have atoned for this popular deficiency.

Had I had a small army with me, and no conscience, I could have forced my passage to Jarabub. The only other way for a traveller to get there, is, in my opinion, for him to start from Jerjub—or some small harbour on the Mediterranean Littoral, in that no-man's land which conceals the frontier between Egypt and Tripoli; and to traverse the unknown and unexplored Plateau in the direction of Jarabub. He may leave his conscience on board, or take it with him, by this route: because there will be no one to *visé* it: but he will need a large caravan, well-armed. How to get this caravan to meet him at his port of debarkation, I leave it to him to find out: it is not impossible. How to get into the fortress of Jarabub, I do not know. How to get out of it again is the vital question.

And now I have done with Jarabub and all its works.

I have sought to conduct the reader through the same sequence of thought and incident that I, myself, followed and experienced. If, in this way, I have roused his interest only to disappoint him in the end, he must blame my hard luck and not my logic: I should be glad to find a sympathizer.

True, I anticipated failure, at starting; but I also hoped, and had reason to hope, for success, which was quite possible, owing to the unknown factors [1] in the case, or local conditions, hitherto unexamined or at least unknown to myself and the public.

My very failure, strenuously combated, is, however, an instructive object-lesson; because it proves, what hitherto has been only conjectural: the obstacles placed in the way of Europeans, who, for perfectly legitimate and pacific ends, seek to penetrate to Jarabub. From the Tripolitan side, the obstruction is, I believe, still more formidable. It is something, too, to know that the frontier is not locally admitted to be the one drawn on every published map I have seen: that Jarabub is not in Egypt, but in Tripoli. This fact the Khedivial Government have had the wisdom to recognise: they wish the Senussi further from them.

To prove my point, it has been necessary to enter into details; to exonerate myself from crass foolishness, I have been obliged to delineate my experiences step

[1] For instance, the rivalry between the Sherkyin and Rharbyin. The conditions in this respect were quite changed, from what my reading had led me to expect, when I arrived at Siwa.

by step, as these occurred. I trust I have not overlaboured the argument. No man likes to write himself down an ass. And as, for some inscrutable reason, known only to authors and publishers, in common with their respective bankers, I was bound to write on this subject, I could not introduce the one, without referring to the other, aspect of my journey.

Success, such as it was, grew out of my failure. If, as I am told by Egyptologists, I have opened up the oasis to them and to others interested in scientific research and exploration, who may now reasonably hope for an equally friendly reception, my little trip will not have been in vain. Indeed, I hope soon to repeat it, and to make a prolonged stay at Siwa, in order to redeem my shameful neglect of its antiquities.

Here endeth my *Apologia*.

CHAPTER XXII

THE ANTIQUITIES OF SIWA

HAVE you ever by any chance taken charge of a small yacht, sharing watch and watch with the men? If so, you will recall the soothing sensation of slipping into smooth water after the rough-and-tumble experience of a couple of days' dusting at sea.

That is how I felt on the morrow of my defeated hopes. Rest after struggle. Sunshine after storm. In truth, I was disposed to take it easy.

Worse than that! Having failed in the main object of my journey, I feel disinclined to seek solacement in the intrinsic charms of the oasis. These bored me: they seemed even commonplace, in comparison with my ambitious programme, and not capable of recompensing me for the effort and expense that I had fruitlessly incurred. That is why I restricted my stay at Siwa to its narrowest limits.

I was wrong. How wrong I only knew when, on my return to Cairo, every little scrap of information, every little trifle of antiquarian value, was seized upon with avidity by those to whom such things are more

than food and raiment, beyond price. I neglected my opportunities—opportunities of exploration that had fallen to none of my predecessors—and I was punished through the generous recognition by experts of the insignificant results of my journey.

For, when you come to consider it, what untold wealth may lie buried in this ancient oasis. The Siwans themselves speak of secret passages and buried treasures, which the priests used and received in the practice of their art of prophecy. Treasure-seekers have, indeed, turned up the ground in all directions, rifled tombs, and overturned monuments. But it is not of such troves that I would speak. I think only of the voices of the past that have left their impress—their phonographic record, as it were—on the graven stone.

Many of the antiquities described by previous travellers are no longer to be seen. The ruins are more ruinous still: the sand covers everything, and preserves these for future investigators. Every year, the destruction of these monuments proceeds apace, their very existence becoming less and less known to the people of the oasis. Every year, these relics of antiquity are plucked from our grasp.[1]

Situated in the most romantic surroundings, the ruins of Jupiter Ammon, traditions of which may be found buried in the tombs, await the advent of the

[1] The Khedivial Government have, at my request, instructed the Mamur of Siwa to do his utmost to preserve the monuments from further demolition and decay.

explorer, of the expert. It is scarcely credible, but it is a fact, that I was the first to bring back to Cairo and civilization any copy of hieroglyphs which Egyptologists had seen or could decipher; the first, too, to stumble upon a wall-painted tomb of authentic Egyptian origin, as the hieroglyphic record (the only one hitherto discovered) declares and makes known.

This proves how superficial must have been the investigations of previous busybodies at Siwa: or rather, since some of them were accomplished explorers, how restricted their opportunities must have been. But, up to the present day, no serious attempt has been made to open this closed book of the dim and distant past.

I, however, had a free hand; and, I am ashamed to confess, used it but sparingly—as an idle apprentice rather than as a faithful workman. What I did accomplish was a pastime; and I examined merely those spots that were within easy reach of my camp, though these happened to be the only ones where important remains were known to exist. I was too lazy and indifferent to go far afield, especially as I was assured by Sheikh Abdulla, who knew the oasis well, that the reported ruins and tombs at Bled el-Rum, Arashié, Amudein, and Kamissa were buried in the sand.

The stone of which the temples are built is limestone, from the neighbouring Plateau, rich in fossils.

This building material is often impregnated with salt, and becomes friable by the action of humidity or by coming in contact with salt water. Wind, sandstorms, and sudden variations of temperature are other agencies of destruction, by which these monuments are undermined and fall crumbling to the earth.



AGHORMI

After Siwa, the principal town of the oasis is Aghormi, situated about three miles distant, to the north-east, and embowered in a luxuriant palm-grove. The town is inhabited by some two hundred Rharbyin, whose ancestors, a century ago, recaptured it from

the Sherkyin. The most ancient inhabited rock in the oasis, it was the acropolis of Siwa, and contained the king's palace, the *harîm*, barracks for the soldiers, and, above all, the great Temple and Oracle of Jupiter Ammon. Its dominating position gave protection to the minor Temple, or Ammonium, of Umma Beyde, within a few yards of its walls, with which it was undoubtedly connected by an underground passage—the remains of which were seen by Hamilton.

Whether other subterranean passages lead to the Fountain of the Sun, less than one mile further south, and to the town of Siwa, cannot be stated with any certainty: but this conjecture is attested by the *débris* of choked and buried passages in the immediate neighbourhood.

Unhappily, owing to the restricted area of the platform of rock on which the town of Aghormi is built, all the ancient masonry and the remains of the Temple are so embedded in rubbish-heaps, so overgrown by modern tenements, that one would have to pull down half the town in order to examine these. At places, however, one can discover vestiges of the former shape and proportions of the Temple and other buildings connected with the cult of Jupiter Ammon. Stately halls have been turned into modern hovels, one on top of another: but portions of the old walls—some of which have hieroglyphs—may still be examined by entering these dwellings.

Only one large hall—so far as I was able to discover—remains intact: and its walls, blackened by centuries of smoke, show no trace of hieroglyphs. This court was much larger in its original structure, because a modern wall now divides it into two parts. The doorways are high, the cornices well modelled, and the large stones used in their construction are admirably worked and fitted. Undoubtedly, it was built by the same race of people who raised those wonderful temples on the banks of the Nile.

My visit to Aghormi was a brief one. I entered by the only gate that gives access to the town; and, ascending a steep and sinuous path, through a second gateway and past a well, 50 ft. deep, reached the centre of this ancient citadel. The interior recalled the inner town of Siwa, only that it was more cramped and squalid. And, with the exception of the large court, I saw very little to encourage further explorations, being told, moreover, that nothing now remained of the ruins about which I enquired. I left the town, therefore, not much wiser than when I entered its gloomy portals.

From an artistic point of view, Aghormi, surrounded by apricot and pomegranate trees, compels admiration on account of its picturesque surroundings and romantic rock-sculpture. Its historical associations and antiquarian interest can be appreciated only by experts.

Within a stone's throw of Aghormi are the remains

of the minor Temple of Jupiter Ammon—Umma Beyde. Of these picturesque and still imposing ruins, only a portion of the gateway, or pylon, remains standing. Roof and walls are overturned, and lie buried in the sand; but great blocks of limestone, covered with sculptures in low-relief, and beautifully executed, attest its former grandeur. Green and blue tints, now much faded, form a background in some places to the gods of Egyptian mythology, winged disks, etc., with which tourists on the Nile are so familiar. Slightly raised above the surrounding desert, one knows not what treasures lie buried in the sanctuary below.

According to the Siwans, a portion of Umma Beyde was thrown down by an earthquake in the second decade of this century; but, comparing my photograph, and what I myself saw, with the views and descriptions of my predecessors, it is evident that its destruction has been wholesale, even within the last ten years. Owing chiefly to the depredations of the treasure-seekers—Mojabra and others—little now remains intact of this second Ammonium.

Still further to the south, though less than a mile distant, is Ain Hammam, which, to my mind, is the gem of the oasis. Enshrined in a beautiful setting of Tropical vegetation, the Fountain of the Sun reflects the azure sky which has lighted its limpid depths for over two thousand years. Circular in shape, eighteen feet in depth, the ancient masonry of its sides as firmly



THE FOUNTAIN OF THE SUN.



set as if built but yesterday, this perennial, effervescing pool—the largest and most bounteous spring in the oasis—must have served many of the sacred rites of the Ancient Egyptians, connected with sacrificial and funereal ceremonies.



UMMA BEYDE: RUINS OF TEMPLE

The water of this ever-flowing fountain drains off into neighbouring depressions, and irrigates a considerable tract of country; but it is brackish—and, as it appeared to me, also sulphurous to the taste. Its temperature is uniformly about 85° Fahr., day and night—a fact to which, according to Diodorus, the

Fountain of the Sun owed its name. Its Arabic cognomen, Ain Hammam ('fountain of the pigeons'), is, as I have elsewhere remarked, equally inapplicable, at the present day.

In this cool and shady retreat, I spent some time, watching the spring, or springs, bubbling up from below. It is a spot in which to realize the gracious charm of an oasis.

Reluctantly I rose, and returned to camp, by narrow paths between properties demarcated by mud walls, across openings in the palm-grove where the Siwans have built houses for themselves; plunging again into umbrageous avenues, parting the palm-fronds that obstructed one's passage, and emerging on the sunlit desert round the frowning walls of Mount Siwa.

Most of my spare time was now devoted to the exploration of Jebel Muta, with results that will be detailed in the next chapter. Apart from that, and what I have already defined, my acquaintance with the antiquities of Siwa ceased.

But, according to the accounts of more enterprising travellers, there are antiquarian attractions in other parts of the oasis, even though the remains are, as Abdulla assured me, now buried in the sand.

Chief among these are the ruins of a supposed temple at Arashié—on an islet in a salt-lake—which no European has as yet visited. The unfortunate Colonel Butin brought a small boat for the express

purpose of reaching this charmed and mysterious spot, which locally is invested with supernatural legends; and thereby wooed his Nemesis. Browne attempted to swim his horse thither, but was thrown and nearly drowned. Some say, that the islet contains the sword of the Prophet, and what else I know not; others, that treasure lies concealed there.

At Bled el-Rum there is, or was, a small temple of Egyptian origin; and, near by, a Roman building of the Doric order. Bled el-Rum resembles Jebel Muta: it is a conical hill, with catacombs, *débris* of columns and other worked stones, near the remains of an ancient village. No hieroglyphs or inscriptions have been discovered there. At Amudein, close by, there are the remnants of a comparatively modern building, the brickwork resembling the façade of a temple, on which are some Greek letters.

Kamissa and Zeytun are, as we know, modern villages; the former with seventy, the latter with thirty, inhabitants. The district is surrounded by olive and fruit trees, the soil being strongly impregnated with salt, in the neighbourhood of a *sebkha*. The conical limestone hill on which Kamissa is built is larger than Jebel Muta; it contains catacombs and ruins of an ancient village.

With this imperfect survey of the antiquities of Siwa, I shall pass on to the only spot that engaged my serious attention—Jebel Muta.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE HILL OF THE MUMMIES

THERE is nothing morbid about a mummy. It is not a body, and still less a corpse; it is hardly even what sensitive people regard as 'the remains.' Age has robbed it of its humanity. It is just a mummy: nothing more nor less.

A mummy is, of course, as dead as a door-nail, being definitely defunct. Palpably, painfully dead, nothing in the world looks deader—not even a drowned policeman.

And yet, nothing more vividly recalls the past—links us to the dust of ages—than just these dried strips and framework of a human being. Roll him up ever so tightly, disguise him from all human semblance, paint him and tar him, he still revives the day when, ages back, he lived and loved. There is therefore something uncanny about being confronted with the effigy of a man or a woman who drew the breath of life thousands of years ago. If their renown have survived, and we know them for what they were, they speak to us again with the voice of history and mutely

appeal to our common humanity. Such mummies are worth humouring: we shut them up in glass cases.

Nevertheless, in spite of the platonic regard I have for mummies, I cannot help condemning their egregious egoism in so unreasonably prolonging their mortal coil. No man has a right to preserve himself in perpetuity: considerations of space, as editors say, preclude such a universal contingency. That is why I had no compunction in ejecting mummies from the spot where I found them, centuries after their lease had expired. Such mummies should be boycotted.

The Siwans, very sensibly, regard this matter in the same light. Being washed out of their town by a deluge of rain, twenty years ago, they adjourned in a body to Jebel Muta; and turned out the dead to make room for the living. In other words, they took up their abode for a time in the tombs.

And very cosy little bungalows these are! Light, clean, airy, and dry as the bones that litter the hill, one could not desire better quarters—from the troglodyte point of view. Besides, to Mohammedans, these mummies, having had the bad luck of living in the Time of Ignorance—*i.e.* before the appearance of the Prophet—are so much infidel carrion. Away with them! But nobody could tell me what had become of the thousands of mummies thus dispossessed of their resting-place. Nor, upon enquiry, could I trace the existence of any papyri or other memorials of the past.

Two heavy metal ornaments and a coin were all that I recovered.

Jebel Muta is the name by which this conical, calcareous hill is known to geographers: but the Siwans call it 'the hill of the mummies' (Gara el-Musaberin). It lies about one mile to the north-east of Siwa town; is about 150 ft. high; and is less than a mile in circumference.

For hundreds upon hundreds of years, this hill must have served as the chief burial-place of Siwa. It stands isolated, and in the very heart of the oasis. Its flanks on all sides are so riddled with tombs, that this huge limestone rock appears to form but a single sepulchre, though one that has held countless generations of Siwans. Family vaults, capable of holding a large number of bodies, prevail; spacious mausoleums are the exception. The tombs open out one into another, or are divided by party-walls. It is a veritable city of the dead.

All these tombs are well worked; a few are of imposing dimensions, and have handsome doorways. But the majority are of the simplest description. With one exception, there were no wall-paintings, though several had stuccoed walls, as if these had been prepared for the artist of dead men's deeds; and there were no hieroglyphs. I entered over a hundred of these. All were empty, and open to the day. But bones were scattered everywhere: bones in the tombs, in heaps,

and bones strewing the hill-side, bleached and crumbling.

In such a maze of tombs, however, some may have passed unnoticed. Moreover, only the surface of the hill has been disturbed, apparently. Are there tombs,



JEBEL MUTA: A WAYSIDE DISCUSSION

inviolate, in the core of the hill? It is more than probable.

I asked whether mummies had been found. Mummies?! Why yes; mummies in any number: one had only to kick up the soil, almost anywhere, to find such things. I set six natives to dig at a selected spot, near

the brow of the hill, on the E.S.E. side; and I commissioned them to find me some mummies.

I enquired, anxiously, whether there were any painted walls, any *kuttab* (papyri) or hieroglyphs? No: nobody knew of any such things. They were quite certain about that.

But one morning an old and wrinkled man—one of the oldest inhabitants, perchance—came, mysteriously, to my tent. He offered to take me to a tomb where there were paintings on the wall. I was delighted; and, with Saïd as interpreter, I set out at once with him.

Our guide conducted us to a spot half-way up the hill, on the north side; and, pointing to a narrow orifice in the ground, exclaimed: 'In there!'

Each of us in turn lay prone on the ground, and slipped into the gaping mouth of the tomb. Once inside, we were able to stand upright.

The shaft was oriented due north and south, descending for about 20 ft., at an angle of nearly 35 degrees, into the tomb which formerly contained a sarcophagus. This rectangular chamber had an arched roof, about 4 ft. high; three of the walls were painted; the fourth, also painted, having been broken down to serve as an entrance for the treasure-seekers. A large block of limestone, partly tilted, lay at our feet. The mummy was gone. The tomb was bare.

Opening out, on either side, of the descending-pas-

sage were several squared and well-wrought tombs—all empty.

I took two photographs—one of the entrance to, the other of the south wall of, the tomb; and set to work to copy the mural paintings. All the walls were



JEBEL MUTA: ENTRANCE TO ANCIENT TOMB

covered with hieroglyphs, in red paint; but I copied only those on the south wall, which appeared to me to be the most important. I append a brief description.

South wall: In the centre is Osiris, Judge of the Dead, seated on his throne. Facing him is the defunct, in an attitude of adoration, an altar of offerings at his

feet. Behind him is the cow-headed Hathor, her hands raised in adoration or as a sign of protection. This goddess wears a headdress in the shape of a vulture; and, above it, not only the conventional moon's disk between her horns, but also a double-feather crown.

There are three legends, or hieroglyphic inscriptions, between these three figures: (1) 'Osiris, in the West, great God'; (2) 'Hathor, Queen of the West, Mistress of the Heavens, Queen of all the Gods'; and (3) 'the defunct, sacred prophet and royal scribe.'

On my return to Cairo, M. Daressy, Curator of the Giza Museum, kindly gave me a transliteration of these inscriptions; and Professor Sayce also deciphered them. But the hieroglyphs being defaced in places, or my copy not being sufficiently exact, there is some doubt as to the meaning of certain symbols. In particular—and that the most important respect—the name is uncertain. The latter authority gives it as *Pa-pá*, with some confidence; the former regards it as a Libyan name (*Pa-ben-pen*, or *Pa-bes-pá*, perhaps). Libyan names were not uncommonly borne by the Pharaohs.

At first, M. Daressy fixed the date of the tomb—judging by the formula of the prayer—as falling within the XX. dynasty (1200 B.C.). Subsequently, he stated it to be, as in greater probability, a tomb of the time of Alexander the Great: 'perhaps,' wrote he, 'this defunct scribe even saw the Macedonian conqueror arrive at the oasis!' (332 B.C.).

The prayer or invocation of the prophet need not be recapitulated here, being similar to the funereal texts so common on Egyptian monuments.

East wall: The defunct is here represented, conducting four oxen, one under the other, by four cords, which he gathers in his left-hand—a by no means common design.

West wall: The defunct is here engaged in some peculiar act of consecration, striking with a sceptre four large boxes, each surmounted by four plumes, and supposed to contain priestly vestments.

I had no time to copy the hieroglyphs on the east and west walls.

Though the date of the tomb and the name of the defunct are uncertain, it is of some consequence to have secured absolute proof of the existence in the oasis of painted sepulchres of Egyptian origin. Doubtless, others are there, and would be discovered by diligent explorers. What, I believe, Egyptologists chiefly desire to find at Siwa, is the ancient name of the oasis, and, of course, cartouches and papyri. I understand, no absolute proof exists, that Siwa was the ancient Jupiter Ammon, though there can be very little, if any, doubt on the subject.

Emerging into daylight, and casting my eyes upwards, I saw several pieces of dyed cloth, with red and blue stripes, and some matted hair lying on the ground. I traced these to a tomb, which I entered.

Inside, I picked up, off the ground, a fairly large piece of painted wrapping—all that remained, except masses of bones, of a rifled tomb.

This mummy-wrap I carefully preserved, and, on reaching Cairo, gave to Professor Sayce, for presentation to the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford.

Professor Sayce thus describes it: 'A mummy-shroud, not incased in a coffin, but buried in the sand with bitumen. At the upper end is a picture of the deceased on his bier, with Anubis standing beside him and pouring the waters of life over the body; while a worshipper is standing on either side in the attitude of prayer. Below, on either side of the shroud, are figures of the four genii of the dead: Amsel (with a human head) who took charge of the larger intestines, Hapi (with an ape's head) who took charge of the smaller intestines, Duau-mulef (with a jackal's head) who took charge of the lungs and heart, and Kebh-sennef (with a hawk's head) who took charge of the liver. The genii are placed one above the other, two on each side, and between them are bands of rosettes.'

This mummy-cloth is of the Roman age, and is, I am told, somewhat rare.

The only other troves I secured were a coin and two heavy metal ornaments, which were found in the tombs and brought to me for sale by a native. The ornaments were made of a mixture of gold, silver, and

copper: one being a bracelet, the other an unbent bar of the same composition.

The coin, which I presented to the Museum of Antiquities at Alexandria, through Yakub Artin Pasha,



EXCAVATION OF MUMMIES

turned out to be a very rare Ptolemaic bronze, of which only three or four examples are known to exist. On the obverse is the ram, sacred to Ammon; on the reverse, an eagle and a six-rayed star. Coming from the oasis where it was coined, or current, it is an authentic

example. Its date is 311–305 B.C., during the independent interregnum of Ptolemy I. Soter.

In spite of repeated enquiries, I could discover no trace of papyri.

Whilst I was occupied in this and other work, six men had been busy digging for mummies. When I arrived at the spot where they were engaged on their task, I found several mummies, or portions of mummies, had been unearthed and placed in picturesque positions outside the mouth of the tomb. These I photographed as they stood.

There were five mummies, all imperfect, the head of a woman with matted hair, and odds-and-ends of bones—all of which had been raked out of the sand. Nothing of value was found. The bodies were but sparsely provided with wrappings, and were in a very disintegrated state. There was no trace either of bitumen or of wooden coffins.

The method of mummification and mode of interment practised by the Ammonians appear to have been of the simplest description. Apparently, the bodies were simply salted; then wrapped up in their casements, and thrust into the sand. Not improbably, as Hamilton suggests, some of the self-respecting mummies received a coating of stucco, like a suburban villa-residence.

I made no attempt to divest these mummies of their scanty vestments: they were so distressingly dusty.

Neither were they worth carting away. They appeared to be a middle-class family party—probably of the Roman age. I left them reclining where I found them, having forgotten to tell the men to re-inter them, and give them decent burial.

During my subsequent visits to Jebel Muta, I found nothing else. But a native brought me a well-shaped vase, having roughly-painted figures on a fine blue background, and with a Greek inscription.

This completes my survey of the Hill of the Mummies.

CHAPTER XXIV

FAREWELL TO SIWA

My last day at Siwa arrived; and none too soon for me. The hot weather was coming on, and I was anxious to get away. Abu was certainly ill, and had symptoms of fever; but the other men, with the exception of two, were quite well. The camels, such as they were, were fit for travel. I had nothing more to expect, nothing more to gain, nothing more even to desire by a longer stay. I had 'done' and done with Siwa; and, in the back of my mind, I knew that Siwa had 'done' me.

I had been constantly paying visits to the Mamur, and receiving visits from him and the other Egyptian officials. On the last day, I invited them all to an *al fresco* entertainment in the Mamur's garden. This was within a few yards of my camp, and was a pleasant, cool retreat during the mid-day hours. Here we had a symposium, and more speeches. We were a merry party, and excellent friends.

The mind of the Mamur was at peace: his face was beaming, his manner benevolent. He acceded at once

to my request that, as a fitting *finale* to the eventful day, the slaves of Siwa should be summoned to dance before us.

Forthwith a messenger was despatched to the town, bearing the Governor's orders to that effect. The slaves were instructed to assemble before the *mamurîa* at five o'clock—at two hours' notice—and to bring their musicians with them, without whom they would not march.

At the appointed hour, our little party having in the meantime separated, I repaired to the Mamur's house, expecting to find the slaves assembled or approaching from the town. There was no sign of them. Fresh orders were sent to hurry them up, as I was anxious to secure, before sundown, photographs of this picturesque spectacle. But there was no apparent response.

For over an hour, the Mamur and I were seated, consuming countless cigarettes, in expectation of their coming. Messenger after messenger was despatched, each with a more urgent and peremptory command; until, at last, when the sun was setting, and my hopes were disappearing, we descried a mob of people emerging from the town.

Only a small contingent—some fifty or sixty people—of whom not more than a dozen or so were real slaves, had obeyed the Mamur's edict. But the sheikhs of the slaves were there: and these men explained, in answer to the Mamur's protest, that the slaves were

working in the fields! The Mamur was wroth, and bit his lip with vexation: he did not like me to see his orders flouted. Meanwhile, the light had failed.

The procession of slaves approached in a cluster of black faces and flying garments. They were marching—or, rather, tumbling forward—to the rhythmic



BLACK, BUT COMELY

sound of their music. Many carried half-stripped palm branches, held aloft; and they sang as they went—heavily.

I was told that only the black men—evidently from the Central Sudan—were slaves. Many wore a simple vestment of sacking; but they did not behave as if

they were in sackcloth and ashes: they were shouting with merriment. Others, and particularly the sheikhs, were better clad. All had skull-caps on their heads.

The dance that they performed was of the least complicated order. The musicians, playing drum and pipes, sat down together; and round them circled the dancers, turning on their centre, four or five in each row—like the spokes of a wheel. The humour of the by-play appeared to consist in the ridiculous postures displayed by the men as they plunged and pirouetted past us. There certainly was one big black who was intensely funny—an accomplished clown.

This went on for some time. When I had had enough of it, the performance was stopped.

I handed *bakhshish* to the Mamur, who solemnly transferred it to the principal sheikh, counting each piece aloud.

The sheikh then made a little speech, the purport of which was, that the money he had received would be expended in tea and sugar, to be distributed only among those who had *worked.* There was great applause: a howl of exultation went up, in derision of their comrades who had stayed away.

Their procession having been reformed, they dumped back to the town. But the sheikhs followed me to my tent, and received presents for themselves.

It was most entertaining to see these great hulking

fellows receiving, with glee, trifling gifts, like children from a Christmas tree.

The Abyssinian woman, who had catered for us, was also there. To her I presented a mirror and a magnificent diamond brooch (of the value of a few pence),



FAREWELL TO SIWA

which made her positively squirm with inexpressible satisfaction. It was worth going all the way to Siwa to witness her extravagant delight. She seized my hand to kiss it: but I bolted into my tent, lest worse should befall me.

And thus our last day at Siwa came to a close.

Leave-takings over, we broke camp the next day —Friday, 8th April—at seven o'clock.

The weather was fine and cool; the oasis was bathed in sunlight, and the slumbrous town seemed at peace with all the world. Now that the moment of departure had arrived, some of us left this bewitching spot with reluctance. The men lagged behind; camel-loads broke, and had to be adjusted: we were a straggling party. It took us some time to get clear of the oasis.

Once in the open, the caravan was marshalled; and we settled down to the steady tramp with which we were so painfully familiar, and which was to last, day in and day out, for fully sixteen days. I was determined to get back to Cairo in that period of time, whatever weather we encountered: and that meant hard travelling.

Forward!

CHAPTER XXV

MEETING WITH MOJABRA

In spite of our friendly reception by the Siwans, I did not trust them. I knew them to be treacherous: and was quite prepared to meet a party of their braves blocking our path ere we emerged from the oasis. They might still suspect us of attempting to outflank their posts of observation on the road to Jarabub; and I expected to be kept under surveillance for the first day of our departure. That is why I kept the caravan well in hand, and was, myself, from my lofty seat on camelback, constantly on the alert, whenever we happened to be passing through desert that provided cover. These suspicions were stimulated by the timorous remarks of Abdul and the wary behaviour of our guide.

I mention this, in order to explain an incident that befell us about one hour before sundown, just as I was looking out for a favourable spot to camp for the night, in the choice of which I was, for the above considerations, more than usually fastidious.

We were passing through the last patch of vegeta-

tion. The desert at this spot is undulating. Bushes of tamarisk (*táfa*) crown numerous knolls of sand, on all sides. It was an excellent place for an ambush.

Abd-el-Gade, the guide, was striding ahead, his



OUR LAST VIEW OF SIWA

elbows resting on the stock of his gun, slung over his shoulder, in the attitude he so often assumed on the march.

I rode a short distance behind him; and the caravan followed in orderly procession.

Suddenly, I observed Abd-el-Gade stop abruptly,

and, unslinging his gun, rapidly remove the leather covering that protected the lock.

Glancing ahead, I saw four Arabs, with guns in their hands, as if menacing our advance. They were about three hundred yards distant. Three of them were partly screened by a tamarisk bush; the fourth had dropped on one knee, in the open, with his gun at the ready.

Abdul, who was marching at my side, looked up at me, in a scared way, his glance full of reproach, as if I alone were responsible for the situation.

'They wait for us,' he said.

'Who are they?' I asked.

'Siwans,' he rejoined. 'It is their way.' Seeing no caravan ahead, his assumption was reasonable.

Abd-el-Gade had, in the meantime, skilfully led us on one side, where we also obtained cover; and, advancing a few paces, he, too, dropped on his knee, with his gun thrust forward, awaiting developments.

Without speaking a word, each man got his gun ready: and I was gratified to see the alacrity and smartness with which their preparations were completed. In less than two minutes, we were ready for all contingencies.

Dismounting from my camel, I gave the word to advance; and strode forward, with Abd-el-Gade at my side.

As we emerged from our shelter, we observed the four Arabs, walking abreast, just leaving theirs. But their guns were now slung over their shoulders;

and the first of a string of camels was appearing over the crest of the mound behind them. They, like ourselves, were travellers.

My men at once put up their guns. Abd-el-Gade and three others diverged to meet the strangers. I marched ahead, and ignored their existence, since they did not salute us.

They were a party of Mojabra, bound for Jalo, on their way back from Egypt. The four leading men were splendid Arabs, physically; but, to my prejudiced eyes, they had a slave-driving appearance—the Mojabra being habitual slave-traders. Their caravan consisted of seven camels, and, besides themselves, four Mojabra acting as camel-drivers. All the eight men were armed.

Not wishing to have any dealings with them, I called off my men.

'Well?' I asked Abdul, when he rejoined me, 'who are they?'

'Mojabra, returning to Jalo.'

'But what were they up to, threatening our advance?'

Abdul shrugged his shoulders. Afterwards, he and Abd-el-Gade told me, that these Mojabra would undoubtedly have attacked us, had they found us weak, and unprepared to resist them. They were black-faced rascals.

'What did they say?'

'Oh! same as usual. They asked who you were,

and where you had been to? They also asked if we had been past Siwa? They all want to know that!'

Doubtless the Mojabra would! My impression is, that the absurd obstructions placed in the way of Europeans endeavouring to penetrate westwards are due, largely if not entirely, to the fear of their discovering and subsequently reporting the continued existence and the exact extent of the traffic in slaves, of which at present we are in ignorance.

I was glad the Siwans had not proved untrue to their salt; though this incident did nothing to allay our suspicions. On the contrary, everyone was now on the alert; and there was a good deal of excited talk among the men. Instead of camping in the *hashish*, for the benefit of the camels, I led the caravan into the open desert; and selected a suitable spot for our night's rest.

'Do caravans usually meet in that distrustful way?' I asked Abd-el-Gade, when, the tents being pitched, we fell to chatting.

'No, no. Single Arabs may, when they encounter one another in the desert; but not large caravans. We were too strong for them.'

That night we formed our camp into a *zariba*; and I set a watch. The moonlight revealed the desert for miles round: and we were therefore safe from a surprise.

Four o'clock in the morning being the favourite

hour for such visitations, I selected that watch for myself. Saïd kept me company, and brewed me some tea—the night being comparatively cold (48°–45° Fahr.).

But the hours passed, and the day dawned, without our fears being realized.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE RETURN JOURNEY

THE primitive conditions of human society at Siwa, ending with the misplaced but not unfounded distrust in our hosts, were not without interest to one who, like myself, went into the desert to seek fresh impressions.

There is a decided fascination in going about a place in constant watchfulness against intrigue and treachery, and prepared against any open attack. It relieves the tedium of routine and stimulates one's nerve-centres. It varies the soul-destroying monotony of existence in cities; it breaks down the conventionalities of life to which we are such willing slaves; and it is more bracing to the system than the so-called 'cures' of fashionable watering-places. I am disposed to recommend a course of desert travel and adventure to all who suffer from sluggish livers or over-indulgence in the Nirvana of civilization. Call it a nature-cure: and it will certainly become popular, doctors notwithstanding.

When we resumed our march on the following day, I felt we had taken a final farewell of Siwa. We had

naught but the blazing desert before us—that, and many days' tedious travel; nothing to hope for, except to reach Cairo as soon as possible; nothing to complain about, save our fruitless errand. Life was dull indeed!

A propos de bottes, not one of the men had started back with the new shoes I gave them. I expected as much. But one could not complain about that: they evidently preferred bootless errands. I made up my mind to a little slave-driving on this journey.

The camels[1] needed no urging. They knew that they were returning home, and stepped out sturdily, every step taking them nearer to their green grazing-grounds. The men, too, were in high spirits, breaking out into song and laughter.

Only Abu was depressed and sluggish, hanging on disconsolately to the pack of a camel. He was thinking, no doubt, of the endless tramp before him.

I called him to my side, and asked him how he was.

'Middling,' he replied, lugubriously.

That was his usual report, when I enquired after his health.

'Come to me to-night for some more medicine.'

[1] The speed of a laden caravan does not exceed 2½ miles an hour, on a fair average. But one man, walking with a camel, can, apparently, travel faster. We took three days (30 hours) to traverse the distance between Siwa and Gara. Abd-el-Gade once walked it, with his camel, in one day and one night. Dromedaries and fleet riding-camels travel, of course, at great speed for long distances. Even my camel was once ridden by Saïd from the Fayum to Cairo (40 miles) in 9½ hours, trotting and walking.

The men tittered. They had been chaffing Abu unmercifully during our stay at Siwa, because of his indiscretions of diet. I found out afterwards, too, that he had opened a new tin of tongue and eaten it all, much to the disgust of Abdul.

'We can't get tongues in the desert,' my dragoman explained. 'Abu, he is always stealing things. Now he open a new tin for himself.'

As I had had tongue almost every day for lunch since leaving Cairo, one tin more or less meant little to me. I had already eaten a very Babel of tongues.

We reached Gara on the afternoon of Easter Sunday (10th April); and I availed myself of this opportunity to visit the village.

Gara is only a small place, containing no more than seventy-five inhabitants, some of whom are Senussi. It is said that, after the maximum number is reached, a death is sure to follow a birth in the village, owing to the limitations of space. The cause of death is not certified in such cases, I understand. The Eskimo, we know, follow this anti-Malthusian custom; but I should doubt very much whether it prevails at Gara. Certainly the villagers are miserably poor: they have no industry except the manufacture of baskets and matting, as at Siwa; and their date-palms are not numerous. All the men appear to go about armed, and to be in some trepidation about admitting strangers into their fortress-village.



THE INDUSTRY OF GARA.



I was received at the entrance by the headman, who presented an offering of dates; and was conducted over the greater portion of the village. I remember only steep and winding pathways, blocked by heavy doors; dark tunnels and narrow streets; a handful of



THE HEADMAN OF GARA

squalid and indifferent Berbers. The village is a crude *replica* of Aghormi.

Gara is, however, the 'port' of Siwa, from the Egyptian side, and is therefore a place of some consequence to travellers across the sea of sand. Remembering our previous arrival at this oasis, we now made

careful preparations for the return journey over the desert, adding another waterskin as the price of our experience.

The weather had been comparatively cool after leaving Siwa. But no sooner did we enter on our desert march than it turned hot again, the nights also being warm.

It may be remembered that, on our outward journey, we suffered considerable discomfort between Ain Uara and Gara, owing to the great heat and lack of water. This was the worst stretch of desert throughout our route. Here, fifteen years ago, an entire caravan had perished. Starting from Cairo, and bound for Trablis, in Algeria, they failed to strike Moghara: and, in consequence, their water-supply was exhausted before Gara hove in sight. The caravan-track can be traced by heaps of camel-bones; but only very few graves of men are encountered.

Happily, our return journey was made under far more favourable circumstances and conditions. For two days we experienced a strong wind: so strong that, on one night, my tent was erected with considerable difficulty, owing to the loose sand, and the canteen-tent collapsed. No canteen-tent often meant no dinner. But by that time I was hardened to desert fare or contented to sup off scraps.

My chief objection to Abu's culinary arrangements was his blissful indifference to cleanliness. This

reached its highest pitch when, one evening, I heard the voice of Abu summoning the dragoman, who was waiting at table in my tent, to bring out my water. He meant the water I had just washed in; and, when Abdul took it away, I guessed at once what it was required for. It was for the purpose of washing up my plates, knives, forks, and spoons! Abu had a bad quarter-of-an-hour after that trick. The water he had received for this purpose had, of course, been diverted down his thirsty throat.

Abu's propensity to steal was much resented by the Arabs, whose *esprit de corps* was shocked by such conduct. Arabs share and share alike, since, of necessity, they must drink out of the same receptacle and eat off the same platter. For anyone to take advantage of his fellow, and to steal, is, therefore, a serious misdemeanour. Abu, the gypsy, reaped the consequences by being partially tabooed and universally abused.

The fact was, that both Abu and Abdul were not satisfied with the coarse fare of the Arabs: they had lived too often under conditions that provided both variety and plenty. Remembering this, I excused their voracity and want of manner when I saw or heard them fall upon the remains left on my plate, as if they were starving dogs. This performance usually took place outside my tent-flap, where the other men could not witness it.

It took us four-and-a-half days to reach Ain Uara from Gara, travelling from ten to eleven hours each day.

As an illustration of how necessary it is to keep to the caravan-track, I may mention an incident that occurred on the third day after leaving Gara.

The guide had led us too far to the south; but not more than half-a-mile from the caravan-track. I happened to be riding immediately behind him, when, suddenly, my camel plunged into loose sand and sank almost up to his withers. I stepped off my seat without any effort; and, men coming up, we laid hold of the camel, and, in a few seconds, succeeded in dragging him out. Luckily, the camel had got his fore-legs free and on to harder ground, his hind-quarters being buried in the hole he had made. Had a laden camel met with this mishap, I fear we should have been one camel short that night: because, before his load could have been released, his struggles would have buried him deeper.

We had strayed into a patch of *biáma*—desert impregnated with deposits of salt—near some low sand-dunes. For a short time previous to the accident, I had noticed that my camel was walking heavily, occasionally putting his feet deep into the sand; and I was thinking, from the appearance of the desert, that water must be very near the surface: it resembled, in all respects, except in the presence of saline deposits, the

desert at Moghara, where we made a hole only three feet deep in order to reach water.

Abdul was in a state of great excitement:

'Abd-el-Gade! Abd-el-Gade!' he cried, reproachfully, to the guide.

He told me afterwards that he had actually dreamed of this mishap the night before; and that, in his sleep, he had shouted to Abd-el-Gade to pull the camel out. Since he had nothing to gain by deceit, I believed him.

We steered very carefully after that, all the camels plunging heavily at times; and it was some relief to find ourselves again on harder ground.

When we arrived at Ain Uara—which, by the by, my people called Abulrhadi—we found more water than on our previous visit; but it was very salt. About twenty buckets full were taken out of a hole six feet deep.

The camels having had no *hashish* since leaving Gara—and, of course, no water—were very thirsty. They drank long and deep, drawing it up with the raucous sound of intense gratification that Arabs politely affect when sipping their coffee, and as if their internal machinery included a suction-pump. One of them, at least, took more than was good for him, as the sequel will show.

The watering-place at Ain Uara—merely a hole in the sand—is so hidden in the *hashish*, that it might easily be missed by an incompetent guide.

I used, sometimes, to marvel how Abd-el-Gade found his way. That he went straight as a die, from point to point, I proved by my compass and, on the return journey, by my route-map. But he used neither compass, nor star, nor sun, nor anything to aid his instinct for direction and his knowledge of the route, save the few landmarks that helped and checked him at places. To aid others, he was constantly erecting camel-bones, which he selected from the heaps that we passed. This faculty for orientation is, however, a legacy from Bedwin father to Bedwin son. When I showed my compass to Abd-el-Gade, he looked at it incredulously, and not without a suspicion of contempt; perhaps, too, he regarded it as something uncanny: at least, he would have nothing to do with it. The desert was his home: his playground and his battle-field; maybe, also, his final resting-place. God would guide him.

Another peculiarity I noticed among my companions was, that they always spoke about 'my God' and 'your God': as if the God of the Christians were different, and rather more exclusive.

For instance, Saïd challenged my attention one evening, when, after the fatigue of the day's march, I was seated outside my tent, enjoying a charming sunset effect. I was gazing at the silvery crescent of the new moon, then setting in the west; and I therefore asked Saïd, what Arabs did when first they saw a new moon?

'We pray to our God to give us a good month,' he replied, reverently.

'That is good,' I said. 'As for ourselves—we Europeans—we turn the money in our pockets. We hope to find more there, later on. Some of us—these men are Goths—regard that crescent moon as a crisp Christmas card. It is not unlike one.'

Saïd looked a respectful protest. He did not quite understand; and it was better he should not. The prestige of Europeans must be upheld at all points.

'Why do you speak of *your* God, Saïd? He is the same as our God.'

'Oh! no,' was on his lips, though he did not venture to utter the words, being a simple camelman.

'Yes, indeed: only that we look on Him from different points of view. Do you know, Saïd, that the sun you have just seen sink below the horizon there, bathed in blood, looks quite white and clean a little further west. Yet it is the same sun. So much depends on the point of view, Saïd. Climate, too, has something to do with it all.'

I did not often sin in talking over his head—but a lonely man must sometimes speak his thoughts: and Saïd was a chance listener. His sterling qualities, too, bade me regard this faithful henchman as my only companion. I would go anywhere with Saïd, and he with me. *Per contra*, Abdul and I have made our first and last journey together.

Saïd and Abdul are members of a family that claims to have five hundred relations—all living. These two brothers live together, with their respective wives, in one house. Yet, how different they are in character; how unequal in their worldly means! Abdul, I am told, is a great swell in his village of El-Kom el-Aswad: he has 25 *feddans* (acres) of land growing barley, wheat, and clover; many cows and some horses; money in the bank: and a rich garment on his back when, cigarette in hand, he swaggers along the Cairo streets. Saïd, on the other hand, has only his four acres and a donkey, though for business purposes he also keeps a camel. He tills the soil, and rarely follows the lucrative path of the tourist. He dresses as befits his humble lot. He cannot even afford to smoke cigarettes, poor fellow.

I call that hard lines on Saïd, who is a better man than his brother, though not necessarily a better dragoman. I think Saïd's God ought to look after him better.

These rambling reminiscences of the return journey are leading me somewhat astray: but they faithfully reflect the principal incidents, to my mind, which was not engaged upon anything in particular—*pace* Jarabub—and therefore they are not essentially impertinent. The truth is, that I found the journey deadly dull. Perched up on a camel, one can neither read nor write with comfort. I know, because I tried

both, like the man who, for the same reason, asserted that 'honesty is the best policy.'

The heat was so great, that I found an umbrella a necessary adjunct to my head-covering; and on dispensing with this for one afternoon, during which I made persistent attempts at writing, I was rewarded with a sunstroke. Scribblers who go down to the desert on camels should carry a phonograph. It is just possible the wax cylinder would not melt: but I fear the record would be a bit blurred, and result in a drowsy drone.

At Ain Uara, eight days out from Siwa, we completed the first half of the journey, gaining three hours, as compared with our outward march. The camels, being thin, had galled backs; and I doubt very much whether they would have been able to perform the extra stretch to Jarabub and back, without long rests between. Some of the men had very sore feet. My stores, too, were running low, owing partly to the depredations of Abu. And as these facts were borne in upon me, they served as a consolation for my defeated hopes.

We passed many of our old camps, marked by Abu's pathetic monuments of empty bottles. Very often, too, we lunched or camped at the spots selected by Mr. Ward, who had been accompanied on his journey to Siwa by Abdul, Abd-el-Gade, Saïd, and Abdurrahman. If I passed any of these stages, I was

sure to be reminded of the fact by Abdul, who never tired of telling me of the hardships endured by my predecessor on his plucky dash, with only three camels, to the oasis and back.

We reached Moghara early on Sunday, the 17th April, gaining seven hours over our previous record; and camped near a high dune to the west of the salt-lake. The remainder of the day was spent in a much-needed rest for men and camels.

Moghara being 'the half-way house' on the route to Siwa, we felt we had broken the back of the journey; and we set out on the following morning with renewed spirits. So far, we had been lucky in our weather; and there was some chance of escaping another sandstorm.

North-easterly winds prevailed during the latter half of our journey, accompanied by fine bracing weather. The wind rose two hours after the sun and blew with the force of a strong breeze until sunset, when it subsided. Often it was very bleak, and oftener still a discomfort, being a head-wind. Saïd prophesied a *khamsin* at the end of *Zilgada*—the eleventh month in the Mohammedan Calendar—but the 22nd April came and passed without this 'usual' visitation.

Every day the men required more attention at my hands. They seemed to like being doctored. My success in this respect inspired Abdurrahman to solicit physic

for his sick camel. But my pharmacopœia was limited: and I told him I had nothing suitable for her disordered stomach but brandy. Would he take the responsibility of administering a whole bottle? I, myself, hesitated: because I remember once giving a teaspoonful of brandy to a parrot suffering from double pneumonia: and I still recall its drunken stupor and tainted breath as it passed peacefully away.

Abdurrahman's camel was very sick indeed. Not only was she worn out by the journey, but at Ain Uara she had drunk too copiously of the salt water. After leaving Moghara, she had to be relieved altogether of her load. Day after day she trudged slowly behind, arriving an hour or so late every night in camp, her limbs trembling as she sank wearily to the ground. Each day we thought would be her last.

Abdurrahman walked always by her side, with a big knife strapped to the pack-saddle. More than once he offered to use it, so as not to delay the caravan: but I told him to have patience. I did not wish to take him at his word; and I considered that his offer did him credit, since his camel represented the chief source of his livelihood.

I am glad to say that the camel eventually tottered home in safety. From the very first day of her being relieved of her pack to the last stage of her journey, a vulture appeared in the sky and hovered about in expectation of another result. This was the only vulture

or carrion crow that we saw during the whole of our journey.

At this point of my route, I made a slight *détour*, in order to visit the Coptic monasteries of Dehr Suriáni and Dehr Anba Bishoi, and to get a glimpse of the Natron lakes. On approaching this locality, we met a party of four Arabs, who were bound for Mariût (near Alexandria) and had walked from the Fayum in three days and three nights. They had neither food nor water left; but they were strolling along as if bent on a pleasant day's excursion.

I spent the afternoon at the monasteries, visiting both.

There are twenty monks at Suriáni and fourteen at Bishoi. The former is the most interesting of the three monasteries I visited in the Natron Valley, and certainly looked the most prosperous. It was here that the so-called Syriac library was discovered. Both monasteries have good gardens, and wells nearly 100 ft. deep, from which a copious supply of water is drawn up by oxen working a *sakkîa*.

The monks of Dehr Suriáni, too, were more sociable and entertaining than the others. They returned my visit, and appeared to be delighted with their reception in my tent.

The Natron lakes in the neighbourhood are below the level of the Mediterranean, and receive their water, by infiltration, from the Nile Valley. The periods of

their increase and decrease follow the rise and fall of that mighty river—being highest in December, and lowest between May and July, when little or no water remains—and they are very shallow.

From Wadi Natrun to Cairo we traversed the



DEHR SURIÁNI

uninteresting desert as rapidly as possible; but, although on the last day we were twelve hours on the road, we failed to reach our destination that night. We camped at sunset within sight of the Pyramids, at the entrance to the Libyan pass.

We had spent sixteen days, or 156 hours of

actual travel, on the march from Siwa to Cairo, as compared with eighteen-and-a-half days, or 162 hours, employed on the outward journey.

It was peculiarly aggravating to have to go into camp within sight of Mena House : but the pause gave me time to arrange for the removal of myself and my effects to an hotel.

Saïd mounted my camel and rode off in the dark to his village; returning on the following morning with a number of his friends. There was much congratulation between them and our party, who now posed as warriors returning from war. As for Abu, he went about with his feet swathed in bandages of his own devising, which made him look like a wounded pirate.

With a hearty handshake all round, I bid good-bye to my men, and, mounting a donkey, rode into Cairo. My luggage followed on a camel.

Not every day does a mahogany-faced traveller come out of the desert and ride up to the Continental Hotel, mounted on a donkey! Not every day does a luggage-laden camel flop down in the street before this fashionable hostelry!

The ride into Cairo, though a long one, was delightful. The intense green of the vegetation—miles upon miles of it—was, in its way, even more impressive than the gladsome sight of Siwa.

Returning to civilization, after my forty days' wandering in the wilderness, was an appreciable ex-

perience. Here I first learnt of the outbreak of war between the United States and Spain. Here, too, I heard of the brilliant victory of the Anglo-Egyptian army on the Atbara from the war correspondents who had that day (Sunday, 24th April) returned from the front. Here also I realized the day-dream in my tent at Moghara, when the *khamsin* stormed and thundered.



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